

The Bahá'í Faith in Australia: 75 YEARS REMEMBERED

In the 75 years since the introduction of the Bahá'í teachings to Australia, the Australian Bahá'í community has developed into a diverse and dynamic community, possessed of accomplishments undreamed of by its early members, and blessed with ever-increasing resources and potential for the future.

By DR GRAHAM HASSALL.



*Clara and Hyde
Dunn*

The Beginnings

The seed of all Bahá'í communities is the call to unity proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.

In Australia, it was planted by Clara and Hyde Dunn, who arrived in Sydney from America on 10 April 1920.

Over the ensuing 40 years, their efforts firmly established the Faith in both Australia and New Zealand and earned them the affectionate titles of Mother and Father Dunn.

"It is always an indescribable joy", Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith from 1921 to 1957, wrote to the Dunns in April 1925, "to receive your letters and learn of the marvellous progress of your work; your cherished names are graven in letters of gold upon my heart...".

On another occasion Shoghi Effendi ended a letter to the Dunns: "The record of your glorious work is imperishable".

Within a few years of their arrival, the Dunns had established small groups of Bahá'ís in major cities around Australia and assisted the fledgling communities there and in New Zealand to establish the administrative framework of the Bahá'í Faith.

There was little awareness at first of how nine-member local assemblies functioned, and many of the first Bahá'ís had only a partial understanding of the fundamental beliefs and ideals of their newly-adopted faith.

The Australian community included such devoted and capable members as Oswald Whitaker, Effie Baker, Gretta Lamprill, Perce and Maysie Almond, Bertha and Joe Dobbins, Harold and Florence Fitzner, Hilda Brooks, Rose Hawthorne, and Stanley and Mariette Bolton.

These and other early Bahá'ís held public meetings, conducted public teaching campaigns, printed newsletters, presented the Bahá'í

message to public officials and prominent people, and consulted on the administrative affairs of the slowly expanding community.

The first major step came in 1934 when delegates from the communities of Sydney, Auckland and Adelaide elected the first National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand.

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, saw many admirable qualities in the Australasian Bahá'ís. At various times he noted their perseverance, unity, determination, fidelity, diligence, thoroughness, courage, constancy, tenacity, zeal, loyalty, devotion, steadfastness, vitality, vigilance, and self-sacrifice.

His observation of these qualities carried not only praise, but a responsibility to ensure their continuation. He referred not merely to evidences of "unity" amongst the friends, but to the need to "remain united". He also repeatedly urged the Bahá'ís to "Persevere, be happy and confident".

The activities of the Australian Bahá'ís have not been without their struggles, and their limitations: whether these be lack of resources, capacity, or know-how. However Shoghi Effendi, who was all too aware of such limitations and obstacles, reminded the Bahá'ís of their "remarkable" accomplishments, and placed their labours in the context of tasks that lay ahead.

"The work in which your National Assembly is engaged," he once wrote, "and which it is prosecuting with such fidelity, diligence and perseverance is near and dear to my heart. You are laying an unassailable foundation for the erection of mighty Bahá'í institutions which future generations are destined to extend and perfect. Your pioneer work is arduous and highly meritorious. I feel proud of your achievements, realising as I do the circumstances in which you labour. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is watching over you and is well-pleased with your service. Persevere and rest assured. Affectionately, Shoghi."

Hyde Dunn, described by Shoghi Effendi as "great-hearted and heroic", died in 1940. However the tireless Clara continued their work for a further 20 years.

Both were named as "Hands of the Cause", in recognition of their special station in the advancement of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.



Hyde and Clara Dunn with Baha'i friends in Melbourne 1924, before departing for Perth. (Margaret Dixson, prominent Melbourne Baha'i standing first on left).



Clara Dunn

Growth

The achievements of 75 years of labour by the Australian Bahá'ís are indeed impressive.

They result from the initiative of both individuals and groups, and relate not only to the geographic and numeric expansion of the Bahá'í community, but to the development of Bahá'í life and to the gradually emerging identity of the Bahá'í community within the wider Australian society.

Geographically, the Bahá'í Faith spread only slowly in Australia, but at the same time the Australian Bahá'ís managed to take the Bahá'í message elsewhere, including countries of the Pacific.

There were 70 Bahá'ís in Australia in 1934, and approximately 180 in 1947. By 1953, when the National Spiritual Assembly embarked on the Ten Year Plan undertaken by the Bahá'ís world-wide, Bahá'ís were in 60 centres in Australia and New Zealand. In August 1994, the Faith was found in 417 localities across Australia, including 193 communities with local spiritual assemblies. More than 80 ethnic and racial backgrounds were represented in a national community of about 9,000 adults and 4,000 children.

Expansion of the community's administrative capacity and needs gradually led to the acquisition of properties as local and national centres. In 1944 the National Spiritual Assembly acquired its first headquarters in Sydney. In the 1970s the national administrative offices were relocated to Mona Vale, in the grounds of the Bahá'í House of Worship.

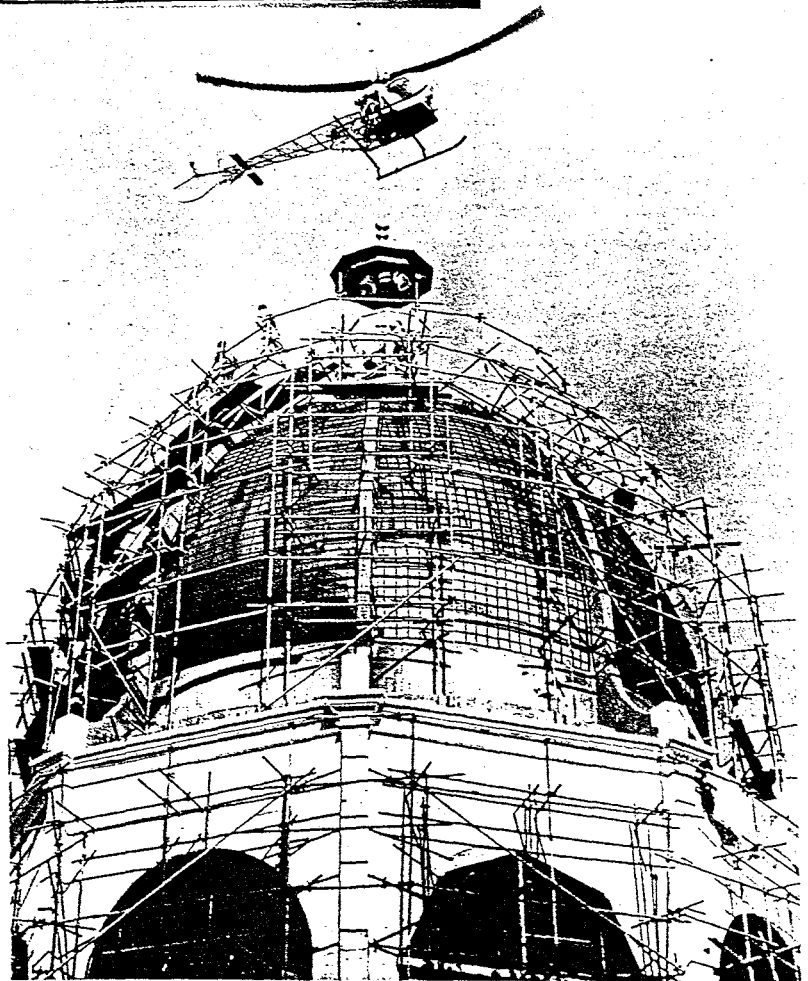
Acquiring a site for a future House of Worship was one of the community's major objectives in the 1950s.

Shoghi Effendi had planned to construct a House of Worship in Teheran, Iran, but in 1955 his efforts were frustrated by a wave of persecution of the Bahá'ís there by extremist Islamic clerics. Instead he decided to build two others, in Kampala, Uganda, and Sydney, Australia.

The Sydney House of Worship was dedicated in September 1961, four years after construction began.



Australian Haziratu'l-Quds at 2 Lang Road, Paddington, in Sydney. Purchased in 1944 at the request of Shoghi Effendi. It served as the National Bahá'í Centre for nearly 3 decades.



For the first time in Australia a helicopter was used in the construction process. A lantern was placed on the dome in 17 minutes.



National Bahá'í offices in the grounds of the House of Worship, Mona Vale, Sydney.

The nine-sided, domed building, attracted considerable publicity. Building and engineering journals reported on technical aspects of the building, while such newspapers as the Daily Telegraph, Daily Mirror, Sydney Morning Herald, and Australian Post also carried reports. Most recently, the House of Worship featured in news coverage of bushfires surrounding the temple property in the summer of 1993-94.

Emergence

The Australian Bahá'ís have been tireless in taking the Bahá'í message to leaders of government, as well as to the Australian public.

Prime Minister Robert Menzies was the first prime minister to be formally presented with information about the Faith. State premiers received similar presentations. In 1967 a nationwide programme of presenting books to government officials from the Prime Minister and Governor General down preceded the 1968 centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's public announcement of his mission.

In each successive year the Bahá'ís have received extensive publicity.

The Faith in Print

The production of Bahá'í literature has always been a vital component in sharing the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Herald of the South first appeared in 1925. Shoghi Effendi encouraged its editors to raise their intellectual and artistic standards, as he had "great hopes" for it, and urged that it be made "as interesting and as stimulating ... as possible", through the inclusion of articles on "a wide range of material whether, social, religious or humanitarian."

Bahá'í Quarterly, the national news journal, subsequently re-named the Australian Bahá'í Bulletin, was founded in 1936.

A publishing committee established in the 1930's produced additional books and pamphlets, and by 1975 had evolved into the Bahá'í Publishing Trust. Now known as Bahá'í Publications Australia, it published 20 titles in 1994 from collections and compilations of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to children's stories. A further 20 titles are in preparation.

Education

Education has always been a significant part of Bahá'í community activities, helping Bahá'ís to learn and better understand their faith as well as educating the next generation. Bahá'í study and children's classes are now held at local level country-wide.

A significant advance in child education was made in 1993 with the preparation and publication of the first national curriculum guide for Bahá'í education

A number of Bahá'í communities, in response to demand from the wider community, have extended their programmes to include weekend "schools" teaching moral education to children and adults. In addition, in public schools across Australia nearly two thousand children choose to attend weekly Bahá'í religious education classes.

The cornerstone of adult Bahá'í education in Australia has been the Yerrinbool Bahá'í School, south of Sydney, established on the property of early believers Stanley and Mariette Bolton.

A summer school was first held on the country property in January 1938, and schools have been held - whether in summer, winter, autumn or spring - each year since.

In the 1970's the school became a deepening, regenerating and teacher training centre. Special programmes for children and youth were developed, and the first Bahá'í Studies conferences were held there in the early 1980's.

The Yerrinbool School and Institute Committee now also conducts such specialist courses as an "Education for Peace Certificate" for young people, and, beginning this year, a three year distance education "Certificate in Bahá'í Studies".

The buildings and facilities are now being extensively added to and upgraded to further its function as a centre of Bahá'í learning. ▶

HERALD OF THE SOUTH
AUSTRALASIAN BAHÁ'Í MAGAZINE



APRIL, 1964

EDITORIAL LETTER TO OURS VICTORIA
MEMORIAL OF GENEALOGY
PLAYED FOR ALL NATIONS
MARRIAGE, BIRTH AND
DEATHS
PEOPLE OF THE WAY
LETTER BOX



Stanley W. Bolton (1892 - 1966). Stanley & Mariette Bolton founded the Yerrinbool Bahá'í School.

Yerrinbool Summer School attendance at Bolton Place: Maysie Almond, Mother Dunn, Alice Beaumont, Bertha & Joe Dobbins, Arthur Turks, Mrs Jean Hutchinson-Smith & the Bolton children, c.1940's.



Some Early Bahá'ís

Mr. Oswald A. Whitaker, first Australian Bahá'í shown with his daughter.



Australians first accepted the Bahá'í message in 1922. Sydney optometrist Oswald Whitaker was a member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand, and served on this body until his death in 1942.

Melbourne artist Euphemia ("Effie") Baker accompanied international Bahá'í traveller and Esperantist, Martha Root, to various centres in Australia and New Zealand in 1924. The following year she and some of the first New Zealand Bahá'ís made the first pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Effie was captivated by the Holy Land and remained in Haifa as hostess at the Western Pilgrim Hostel until 1936.

Her artistic skills were put to use assisting Shoghi Effendi with photographic work, and as first keeper of the International Archives.

Early volumes of the publication "The Bahá'í World" are illustrated by many of her photographs of the Bahá'í monument gardens on Mt. Carmel.

During 1930-31 Effie travelled through Iraq to Persia, making a photographic record of sites and relics associated with the origins of the Bábí and Bahá'í religions. This was published shortly after with Shoghi Effendi's translation into English of Nabil's Narrative (The Dawnbreakers). ■



From left to right: Hand of the Cause of God, Martha Root, Clara Dunn, Effie Baker, & Kate MacLaughlin in Melbourne, 1924.

Effie Baker (1880-1968), first Bahá'í woman in Australia. When Effie travelled in Iran taking photographs she covered herself with a chadur.



Effie Baker with Bahá'ís in Kashan, Persia, during her travels through the middle east taking photographs for the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi. Date: 1930-31.

Development of the Administration

The building of a solid administrative structure has been one of the features of the growth of the Bahá'í Faith in Australia.

This has been founded on an increasing number of legally established Bahá'í centres and elected Local Spiritual Assemblies whose functions are to guide, organise and direct the activities of their local communities.

This work is carried out at the national level by the National Spiritual Assembly, which gradually appointed committees to assist it with specific tasks and areas of responsibility.

Over the years these committees - involving the voluntary work of hundreds of individual Bahá'ís - have contributed significantly to the growth and strengthening of the Faith.

The other arm of Bahá'í administration is known as the institutions of the "learned", whose members have been appointed rather than elected, to advise and assist communities at national and local levels.

In the 1950's the institution of the Auxiliary Board was established to advise local communities on issues relevant to the development and promotion of the Faith.

Clara Dunn, in her capacity as a Hand of the Cause, appointed as Auxiliary Board members, Thelma Perks, and H. Collis Featherstone (himself appointed a Hand of the Cause in 1957) in 1954.

In 1968 a further advisory or "learned" institution was established with the appointment of the first Continental Board of Counsellors for Australasia. Its three members - Thelma Perks, Suhayl Ala'í and Howard Harwood - were entrusted with the task of assisting national Bahá'í communities throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific.

Today, the region is served by ten Counsellors

A Diverse Range of Activities

In the 1980's local assemblies increasingly took the initiative in planning large-scale activities to alert a still largely-ignorant general populace of the existence and purpose of the Bahá'í Faith.

Since 1983 the Kentish community in Tasmania has sponsored annual "alternatives"



The first N. S. A. of the Bahá'ís of Australia & New Zealand, formed, 1934. Members: Pearce Almond (Adelaide), Ethel Blundell (Auckland), Oswald Whitaker (Sydney), Robert Brown (Adelaide), Silver Jackman (Adelaide), Charlotte Moffitt (Sydney), Hyde Dunn (Sydney), Margaret Stevenson (Auckland), Hilda Brooks (Adelaide).



Hand of the Cause Clara Dunn with Auxiliary Board Members Collis Featherstone and Thelma Perks, c.1954.



Hands of the Cause of God Rahmat Muhajir and H Collis Featherston (second and third from left) with (from left to right) Counsellors Suhayl Ala'í, Howard Harwood, Thelma Perks and Rubi Momtazi (Japan), 1971.



First Choir at the Sydney House of Worship. Standing: Merle Heggie, Sue Sale, Cathy Sale, Wanita Buckney, Erica Salter. Seated: Julia Salter, Jennifer Heggie. The choir gave its first performance on 13 December, 1966.

weekends, highlighting alternative technologies and lifestyles. Other Tasmanian communities sponsored "health and healing" seminars.

The Newcastle, NSW, Bahá'í community fostered a sister city relationship with Ube, in Japan.

Other "grass roots" initiatives include the formation in 1984 of the Bahá'í Business and Professional Association and seminars promoting social and economic development.

Bahá'í youth have always played an important role in teaching activities. In April 1969 the first National Youth Conference was held at Yerrinbool, and larger conferences have subsequently been held in all states.

Increasingly, youth have communicated their ideas through visual and performing arts. Musical and literary skills within the Bahá'í community have always been appreciated and encouraged, and the first Bahá'ís frequently included recitals in their activities.

The House of Worship choir, established in the 1960's, has earned a reputation for excellence, participating in activities such as eisteddfods beyond the confines of the Temple. Other forms of music have also been used to take the message of Bahá'u'lláh to ever wider audiences. Groups including "1844", the Western Australian Bahá'í Singers, and Galimaufery, performed widely in the 1970's.

Since the late 1980's, the original and dynamic "Wildfire" theatre group has used drama and music to take the Bahá'í message to audiences in Australia, Asia, and Eastern Europe. They have inspired many other groups around Australia including the Perth-based New Era Singers, Far Sight in Tasmania and Brisbane's O.N.E. Last year O.N.E. received an International Year of the Family grant to perform their show promoting family at several high schools in the Brisbane area.



National Youth Conference, Perth, January 1974.



The first "Wildfire" theatre group toured parts of Australia during January 1988.

Teaching Peace

In the early 1980's, concern at the threat of global nuclear conflict brought a new level of pessimism to Australian society, and the response of many was to turn to materialism and individual concerns.

During this time, the Bahá'í community began to systematically express its views publicly and at higher and higher levels of official

contact, seeking to offer solutions to the plethora of ills besetting society.

In 1984 the National Assembly submitted a statement on peace to a Parliamentary Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence. In October 1985 the statement by the Universal House of Justice to the peoples of the world, *The Promise of World Peace*, was presented to the Governor General, Sir Ninian Stephen, and Sir Ninian subsequently attended a service in the House of Worship observing the International Year of Peace.

The International Year of Peace was used by Bahá'í communities throughout Australia as a springboard for numerous activities fostering and promoting the Bahá'í vision of a peaceful and united future for humanity.

The most significant public achievement was the "Peace Exposition" in the Sydney Temple grounds, which attracted 10,000 visitors. Hugely successful peace festivals and expos were also sponsored by Bahá'ís in Atherton, Caboolture, and Fremantle, resulting in thousands of Australians becoming aware of the nature and principles of the Faith.

The Bahá'ís' efforts during that year earned the National Assembly a "Peace Messenger" award from the United Nations.

A Diverse Community

Aborigines first entered the Faith in South Australia and the Northern Territory in the 1950s.

Fred Murray (1884-1963), the last member of the Minen tribe, became a Bahá'í in 1961. In 1963 he attended the first Bahá'í World Congress, in London.

Year by year, through quiet activities and with sincere purpose, Bahá'í individuals and assemblies have cemented friendships with Aboriginal communities, and sought to express in action the principles of unity in diversity, and the oneness of humankind.

By 1968 the Bahá'í community included members of the Andilyaugwa (Groote Island), Bunanditj, Jirkia Minning, Junjan, Minen, and Narrogin tribes, and by 1983 there were four local assemblies in Aboriginal areas.

In 1985 an important meeting took place in Onslow, Western Australia, between members of the National Spiritual Assembly, the

Hand of the Cause H Collis Featherstone with the Governor General of Australia, Sir Ninian Stephen at the Bahá'í House of Worship service, 1985.



Hand of the Cause H Collis Featherstone (2nd from left) and Mrs Featherstone (far right) with participants from Hong Kong at the Peace Exposition, Sydney.



Gertrude Blum with Fred Murray at Murray Bridge in 1961.



Carnarvon Bahá'í community, and Onslow Aboriginal elders, which resulted in acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings by tribal elder Herbert Parker. Jack Malardy, leader of the Karradjarrrie people at La Grange, also became a Bahá'í, together with more than one hundred of his people.

The United Nations Year of Indigenous People in 1993 inspired countless efforts by Bahá'í communities to promote and demonstrate the principles of the unity of the human race.

The most nationally significant event occurred in October, when Bahá'ís from Australia and the Pacific participated in an



Aboriginal elder Jack Malardy and his wife Lily.



Iranian Bahá'ís at a migrant hostel Melbourne, 1985.

international cultural festival at Alice Springs in collaboration with the local Arrente Aboriginal Council.

The National Spiritual Assembly made its first major public contribution to the national debate on race issues in 1994 when it presented a statement on the reconciliation process to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (See pages 4-7 of this issue).

Refugees

The Australian Bahá'í community underwent a significant change in the early 1980's as a result of events far beyond its own shores.

In 1979 there was a revolution in Iran, the birth place of the Bahá'í Faith. The Bahá'ís, seen by the Muslim authorities as dangerous heretics, were subjected to severe and prolonged persecution.

The suffering and human rights abuses that followed prompted a sustained and concerted effort by the Australian Bahá'í community to raise awareness of the plight of the Bahá'ís in Iran.

It made representations to the heads of Commonwealth Governments when they met in Australia in September 1981, and in 1982 there was extensive media coverage, including programmes on ABC television and "60 Minutes" (Iran's Hidden Holocaust).

As a result of extensive contact with government officials and the mass media, the Australian government publicly and actively protested the treatment of the Iranian Bahá'ís.

In February 1981 the Senate of the Federal Parliament adopted a resolution deploring their persecution, and in August a similar resolution was adopted by the House of Representatives. In March 1982 the government established a special humanitarian assistance programme, under which Iranian Bahá'ís were eligible to migrate to Australia as refugees.

There were already a number of Iranian Bahá'í families here. Some had arrived from Indonesia and elsewhere at the end of the 1950's despite strict immigration policies which made entry into Australia difficult at that time.

As early as the 1960's the National Spiritual Assembly was consulting with the Department of Immigration on the requirements for bringing additional Iranian Bahá'ís into Aus-

tralia, and eventually policy restrictions were eased to allow more Bahá'í migrants.

In the next decade from 1982, more Iranian refugees per capita were received in Australia than in any other national Bahá'í community; by 1988 Iranians comprised 38% of the Australian Bahá'í community.

Although the years of persecution, and the sacrifice of those who died is not forgotten, the story of the arrival of Iranian Bahá'ís in Australia is at the same time one of re-birth into a new culture, and a new land.

By spreading through the Australian continent, into the remotest country towns and even to the islands of the Pacific, Iranian Bahá'ís have added a distinguished dimension to the emerging World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Big Events

Four major international Bahá'í gatherings have been held in Australia. In March 1958 one of four inter-continental conferences was held in Sydney, attended by Bahá'ís from across Asia and the Pacific. A second conference in Sydney, in 1967, coincided with the centenary of the proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh.

A third major conference in Canberra, in 1982, attracted 2,400 Bahá'ís from 45 countries. It was one of five international conferences called by the Universal House of Justice to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of the Greatest Holy Leaf (Bahiyih Khánum, daughter of Bahá'u'lláh), to discuss anew the present condition of the Faith in a turbulent world society. In November 1992, 2,000 Bahá'ís from Australia, New Zealand and around the Pacific came to a remarkable conference in Sydney. It was held simultaneously with the second World Congress, attended by 35,000 people in New York, marking the centenary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh. For the first time, satellite technology allowed the Bahá'ís in Sydney, and other conferences around the world, to experience what was happening in New York via a video communication link.

The diversity of these and other international conferences have underscored the international character of the Bahá'í community, and the contribution Bahá'ís have made to the development of Bahá'í communities in other countries.



Intercontinental Conference 1958.

Dr. Janet Khan, chairperson of the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia, at the time of the International Conference in Canberra, 1982.



Members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia with the Governor of NSW H E Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair and Mrs Sinclair at the Australian Bahá'í Conference, held in Sydney in 1992.



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Australian Bahá'is first moved to the islands of the Pacific in the 1950's. In the 1970's, a new generation departed for such diverse locations as Fiji, Gilbert and Ellice Islands (now Kiribati and Tuvalu), Laos, Malawi, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tonga, Vietnam, and other countries in Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. In 1995, Australian Bahá'is are also working in China, Macau, Taiwan, Poland, Hungary, Japan, Hong Kong, and Vanuatu.

This article has sought to highlight some major themes in the progress of the Australian Bahá'í community during its first seventy-five years.

The achievements directly reflect the efforts of so many individual Bahá'ís, working in families and in local communities, to create communities in accordance with the laws and principles of their Faith: fostering good character; developing spiritual qualities through individual effort and prayer; recognising and developing the unique talents and abilities of each person; establishing interactive relations between the spiritual and practical requirements of life; and playing an increasingly active role in public life.

Local Assemblies are also growing in strength and maturity, as they observe the Bahá'í calendar and holy days, organise study classes for children, youth and adults, provide counsel to those in distress, and turn their attention to the welfare of the needy in their midst.

In 1992 the Universal House of Justice called on this community to devote "prayer, dedicated consultation, and intelligent analysis" to its current circumstances and opportunities.

There can be no doubt as to its past accomplishments, its current diversity and dynamism, and the richness of its human resources and potential for the future.

Whatever its continuing challenges and urgent needs, the Australian Bahá'í community can nonetheless be held in high regard as one community in which people of diverse cultural, racial, national, and social backgrounds are meeting in common purpose, aware of Bahá'u'lláh's call to humanity to unite in its diversity, and wanting to assist in the establishment of His emerging World Order.

Seventy five years worth of memories were the principal fare at memorial gatherings held around Australia on April 8 and 9.

Bahá'is came together to remember their achievements and pay tribute to those early believers who, equipped only with hand-typed copies of passages from the Bahá'í writings and unwavering devotion, set out to conquer a continent with a new message.

Communities throughout the country marked the 75th anniversary, and the National Spiritual Assembly organised a number of special commemorative events.

On Saturday April 8 about 60 people gathered at the graves of Mother and Father Dunn at Woronora cemetery, Sutherland, south Sydney, to say prayers and honour the memory of two of the Faith's most dedicated souls.

Each person was given a red rose which, at the end of the 30-minute service, they were able to lay on the flower-decorated graves in the beautiful garden cemetery.



MARK WILKIE

This was followed by an afternoon tea at the University of New South Wales, Randwick, enjoyed by more than 100 people. Randwick was the suburb where the Dunns lived for most of their life in Australia, and the location of the first national Bahá'í headquarters.

Above: Tim and Irene Sale from Sutherland Bahá'í community lay rose stems on the grave of Mother and Father Dunn as part of a service on April 8th 1995.

RECOLLECTIONS

Memories flowed freely as three speakers threw a spotlight on the past.

Mr Frank Wyss, who was one of the first Bahá'í youth in Australia, knew Mother Dunn very well. He often accompanied her on her travels, including her last trip to New Zealand, and recounted personal memories of a woman who has become a national Bahá'í icon.

Mrs Madge Featherstone, widow of the late Hand of the Cause Collis Featherstone, recalled her first meeting with Mother Dunn the year after she and Collis had become Bahá'ís.

"... Collis and I waited ever so eagerly for the opportunity to meet Mother. We were left in no doubt by Bertha (Dobbins) of the great honour and privilege it would be to meet her.

"During the first week of her visit to Adelaide in May 1945, we went to several gatherings where Mother spoke words of wisdom and of her meeting with 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1912 in San Francisco.

"We were simply overjoyed when it was arranged for her to come to our home to attend a fireside, which happened to coincide with her 76th birthday.

"Collis wrote in his diary: 'It was a wonderful night ... the atmosphere was electrified ... Mrs Dunn was overjoyed and her face was radiant'."

Drawing on correspondence between Hand of the Cause Mr Featherstone and Mother Dunn and others, and the recorded memories of early believers Harold and Florence Fitzner, Mrs Featherstone observed that the Dunn's early years in Australia were extremely arduous. This was not just because they were trying to share new teachings that challenged much of current thought.

"More amazing than anything else was that Father Dunn was already 66 years old when they arrived - already past retiring age!! He became ill and Mother had to work to support them both and she was only 51. Later Father got a job with the Nestles company, travelling across the whole nation."

The 1950s and 60s were also remembered

by Mrs Featherstone in a variety of humorous anecdotes.

A portrait of the Dunn's as an example to future generations of sacrifice and devotion was sketched by Mrs Ann Hinton, and an actual recording of Mother Dunn reading the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá was played.

A special service at the Bahá'í House of Worship in Sydney on the Sunday was attended by more than 400 people, including 40 invited guests. The service included some of Mother Dunn's favourite prayers and passages from the Bahá'í writings.

The wave of nostalgia actually began on March 26 when 31 Bahá'ís, seven of them over 80 years old, gathered in Adelaide to talk about the old days with Mother Dunn. Twenty five of the group had known her and one recalled meeting Father Dunn as well.

Said one observer: "It was a day of joy and laughter as the friends recalled Mother's wit and humour."



Madge Featherstone speaking at the reception held on April 8th at the University of NSW.

Readers at the House of Worship service on April 9th 1995, Madge Featherstone, Frank Wyss, Kay Waterman and Scott Stafford with Graham Waterman reading.

