

Barbara and Michael arrived just before the town of Enterprise was platted. They built and operated the first store in the area. The town was platted around the store and the mill. The town and the businesses grew.

The marriage of Barbara to Jacob Ehram, in 1870, was the first to be conducted in the new town. They had six children, and Barbara decided enough was enough. In addition to her eight, a nephew of her husband's came from Palestine, to live with them in his adolescent years. When the children began to arrive she left and more of the operation of the store to her brother. Eventually the store and machine shop prospered enough that she could afford help to care for the children and house. When they grew up she began to have some time for herself but she did not stand still.

She became, with her sister Elsbeth, very involved with women's suffrage and leaders of the movement would pass through Enterprise. She was also involved with the general social purity movement incorporating such interests as temperance, education, etc. But none of this activity was fully satisfying and she began to seek a spiritual solution.

Here her interests ranged far and wide. Her obituary stated that, "down to old age she was still reaching out for a fuller knowledge and deeper experience of God." Her searching was common knowledge. One time she invited a vegetarian who walked all the way from Chicago and other activity resulted in her being "read out of the church," the local Methodist Church, of which her brother was the pastor. At the end of her life some claimed she was Christian Science, which others strongly disputed.

One of her spiritual expeditions resulted in an uproar all across Kansas. This occurred in the summer of 1897. Her daughter, Josephine, some time before had gone to Chicago to advance her musical training (she eventually sang on the state in the U.S. and Europe). Josephine heard of a spiritual teacher, and relayed information about him to Barbara. She invited the teacher to come to Kansas.

His name was Ibrahim Kheirallah. He was a Syrian of Christian background who had, just before leaving Egypt on his way to the U.S., accepted the Bahá'í Faith. This religion was little-known in the U.S. and he found a fertile audience in Chicago.

The Bahá'í Faith is based on the writings of Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), a Persian of a noble family who renounced the social and governmental trappings of his family to devote his time to spiritual renewal. For this crime he was imprisoned the last forty years of his life. When an attempt was made on the life of the Shah, and he was proven innocent, his properties were seized and he was exile from Persia. He was successively exiled til he reached the worst prison of the Ottoman Empire, in Akka, in present-day Israel. People wrote to him from all walks of life. His writings transformed the lives of many of the recipients and became the scripture of his followers. By the end of the twentieth century his followers numbered some five million around the globe and the Bahá'í Faith was described by the Encyclopedia Britannica

as the “second most wide-spread religion” on earth.

In Kansas, Kheiralla taught his understanding of the Bahá'í Faith and the attendance of some of his students (especially Barbara's brother, Michael, and nephew, C.B. Hoffman) attracted public attention because of their political role in the state (Michael had been a state Senator, C.B. was a member of the K-State Board of regents). This was the earliest documented press coverage of American Bahá'í activities. Kheirallah left a small group of believers who constituted the second Bahá'í community in America. Barbara went on to other interests but this distinction remains.

She died on Nov. 18, 1924 in Enterprise. She had not been well the last decades of her life and frequent trips to Colorado and California provided only temporary comfort. At the time of her death she left seven children: Leonard J. Hilty of Topeka; Mrs. Josephine Abramson of Los Angeles, California; Wm. J.; Arnold W.; Mrs. Julie Ann Kuster of Enterprise; Mrs. Elizabeth Marie Chase of Long Beach, California and Mrs. Lavernia H. Foster of Enterprise. Another son Herbert Jacob died as a young man. In addition there were 16 grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

The funeral was conducted at the home of her daughter Julia Kuster. She is buried in Mt. Hope cemetery of Enterprise. Her grave is a prominent one directly inside the main entrance.

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— Barbara Senn Hilty Ehsam (Used by permission of the curator)