



established on the very spot made sacred and historical by a gathering of Indian Chiefs, centuries ago, to smoke the Pipe of Peace. In 1994 a peace flag was raised at Green Acre which commemorated the 100th anniversary of the first raising of a peace flag on the property in 1894.

The following is the story of how Sarah Farmer's great vision has transformed a small country resort into a great center of learning. Green Acre was first established with no particular religious affiliations, but in a transcendentalist tradition, a philosophical movement that accentuated the spiritual and transcendental over the material and empirical.

Through Sarah Farmer who managed the resort from 1890-1916, a unique environment was established for the purpose of drawing together divergent philosophies and doctrines. From its inception open-mindedness thrived. Since the days of the first summer conferences begun by Sarah Farmer, Green Acre has attracted people of many religions, races, and cultures intent on fostering unity, understanding, and peace.

It was Sarah whose inspiration drew people to Green Acre from many parts of the world. All people, all religions were welcome and are still welcome today. A cross section of humanity came to offer their knowledge and talents - A flowering of the human spirit resulted.

One year in the rich history of Green Acre is cherished above all. 1912 was when Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of the founder of the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh, spent a week at Green Acre and lectured during His tour of the Western world. He spoke of how someday Green Acre would become the site of the first Bahá'í University and the second Bahá'í Temple in the United States. Today the room in which he stayed is reserved for prayer and meditation.

Green Acre, America's first Bahá'í school, has long been associated with the growth and development of the Bahá'í Faith. Here such Bahá'í scholars as Mirza

Abu'l Fadl and Jenabe Fazel taught under the pines; here some of the nation's earliest conferences on racial unity were held; here lived and are buried the Hand of the Cause of God, Louis G. Gregory, and his wife, Louisa; here lived Kate Ives one of the first two Bahá'í women in North America. Here too was held

the first election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada and here was located the first office of the National Spiritual Assembly and the residence of its secretary, Horace Holley.

Today Green Acre thrives as a year round Bahá'í School drawing people from all

around New England, The United States and Canada, and the world. The Sarah Farmer Inn has been restored and renovated to accommodate guests. Extensive work

on other parts of the property have resulted in the creation of a beautiful place to visit and learn about the Bahá'í Faith including a fully functional

Bahá'í bookstore. Picnics and concerts are often held on the grounds bring many people to Green Acre for a pleasant day or two of rest and fellowship.

The final major restoration projects for this day remain renovation of the Chalets and the Library. Most certainly though, Green Acre will continue to change both in scope of education, activities, and number of visitors.

Enter Sarah Jane Farmer

The parents of Sarah Farmer were married in Eliot, Maine in 1844. Sarah was born in their home in Dover, New Hampshire in 1847. When Sarah was two, she was stricken with illness, and her mother prayed that if her life were spared it would be dedicated to God. Sarah needless to say, recovered.

Sarah's mother, Hannah, was a prominent philanthropist, associated with early feminists and involved in the abolitionist movement. Their home was a way station on the underground railroad and Sarah grew up knowing such abolitionists as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Tubman, and Julia Ward Howe, which undoubtedly contributed to her understanding of social problems and the importance of freedom and equality.

Sarah's father was a professor of electrical science and an inventor credited with the invention of the first electrical railway car, the fire alarm pull box, the dial telegraph, the thermoelectric generator, and the voltmeter, to name a few.

Green Acre's Beginnings In Eliot, Maine

When the Farmer family moved to Eliot, Maine in the mid 1880's, Sarah Farmers first project was the revival of the Eliot Library Association. She organized fund raisers and arranged for a collection of books to be donated by John Greenleaf Whittier, a family friend.

The library was a great success. Her next enterprise was to become a partner in a venture to open a resort hotel in Eliot, a decision that was to have far reaching consequences. The Eliot Hotel, built in 1889-90, was dedicated as Green-Acre-on-the-Piscataqua and debuted with the 1890 season. It was immediately espoused as a place with a wonderful and pleasant air about it unlike any other hotel.

In June of 1892 Sarah had a vision of Green Acre as a place where various philosophies and religions could find expression. It was at a lecture in Boston that Sarah first received her inspiration. As she sat in a hot and noisy room listening to a talk by W.J. Colville about "The Abundant Life" through a forming of the Christ within, she recognized how people so eager for knowledge of themselves that they would sit patiently under such deplorable conditions would benefit greatly from a stay at Green Acre. How much more receptive would be the mind and heart if the body were in such a cool and healthy environment! Sarah soon invited Vivekananda, a Hindu from Calcutta, and Dharmapala, a Buddhist from Ceylon, to speak at Green Acre on a universal platform for the

comparative study of religious systems. In 1894, under a tent banked by fragrant pines, Sarah dedicated Green Acre to the ideals of peace and religious unity. She then had the first known peace flag in the world raised and explained:

"In looking for an emblem, we wanted something that would be a call to everybody, and fit everybody - and we felt that the message that had been brought to the world by prophet after prophet was the message of Peace. So we have put on a large banner over our heads - PEACE."

Sarah was inviting speakers of various persuasions to Green Acre and encouraged her guests to listen to all of the lectures without bias. The effect she had on the guests of Green Acre is described as follows:

"Gradually, by sheer force of personality and persistence Miss Farmer established an attitude which anyone should have who called himself a good "Greenacreite"; he would throw off sectarian feeling and listen with respectful attention and with open mind to doctrines even when he thought he might never accept them as his own...The customs of all lands were courteously considered even when they seemed far fetched. Also, a good "Greenacreite" would not hesitate to take part in the ceremonies of an alien Faith. Thus, it was that the conservative Maine people looked with amusement upon some of the things that they saw at Green Acre! Green Acre was an adventure in learning!"

Certainly the opening of Green Acre brought to Eliot, Maine, a town of 1400, as cosmopolitan a crowd as could be found even in New York City. During the decade of the first Green Acre Conferences, those who were associated with the school included the Reverend Edward Everett Hale, writer Edwin Markham, W.E.B. DuBois (founder of the N.A.A.C.P.), Swami Vivekananda, Mary Hanford Ford, Jane De Groff Thompson, writers Ralph Waldo Trine and Helen Campbell, writer and editor William Dean Howells, publicist William Lloyd Garrison, historian John Friske, Lester A. Ward, editor Paul Carus, educator Booker T. Washington, Edward Martin, Elizabeth M. Allen, Josephine C. Locke, Mirza Abu'l Fadl, publisher Edwin Ginn, Sara Bull, Myron Phelps, Thornton Riis, Horatio Dresser, Margaret B. Peeke, General Neal Dow, artist Arthur W. Dow, W.J. Colville, Frank H. Thomkins, Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, actor Joseph Jefferson, Anagarika H. Dharmapala, Nathaniel Schmidt, Franklin B. Sanborn and Charles Malloy of the Concord School of Philosophy, R. Ramarathan, Rabbi Joseph Silverman, and of course, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier.

In 1896, the Ole Bull Cottage (currently the library building) was erected and the Lysekloster Pines were dedicated to the Monsalvat (Mount of Peace) School for the Study of Comparative Religion. Dr. Lewis Janes was invited to direct the Monsalvat School for the Study of Comparative Religion. At the Monsalvat School sometimes as many as seventeen different faiths were represented in a single session. It was said that the chief fault of Green Acre was that such richness of opportunity for growth was offered that one could not find moments sufficient to partake of it all. By the end of 1897 Green Acre was known around the world.

## The Troubling Next Decade

The years following this fantastic start were financially fitful. Sarah had continuous problems with finding funding for the resort despite the fact that much of the work done to keep it going was voluntary and the number of visitors extensive. This difficulty continued through the end of the 1890's and Sarah's troubles were exacerbated by the tensions developing between Sarah and Dr. Janes with whom she'd had disagreements concerning the programs and purpose of the Monsalvant School. These tensions developed into an open rift culminating in Dr. Janes taking full control of the school and operating it independently of Green Acre.

Further financial difficulties were bringing Green Acre to the brink of financial collapse and the partners of the Eliot Hotel Co. wanted to dissolve their partnership. By this time, Sarah was failing in health, undoubtedly due to the strain of running Green Acre. She departed on cruise in January, 1900 bound for the Mediterranean. On the ship, she and her cruise-mate Maria, met two old friends who were bound towards Akka, Palestine (now Israel) to visit Abdu'l-Bahá. Sarah and Maria cabled ahead to Abdu'l-Bahá and requested permission to join the party, a request which was granted. Bahiyyah Winckler writes of Sarah's first meeting with Abdu'l-Bahá:

"As she climbed the steps she gazed into a face of such nobility of character that she knew she was meeting, for the first time in her life, a man of true spiritual distinction. She was in a unique position to judge her fellow beings; she had known the great and the near great. In her diary that night she wrote this one sentence, "Heart too full for speech - received by my Lord"

A powerful bond was formed from this meeting - one that would effect Sarah's future and that of Green Acre forever. Upon returning to Green Acre, Sarah began offering personal classes by appointment on "The Persian Revelation". Thus began anew the breath of Green Acre. Sessions were held on the study of comparative religion at 10:30 every morning except Saturday. One could listen to

Mary Hanford Ford on "The Holy Grail"; Jane DeGross Thompson on "Spiritual Evolution" and "The Abha Glory"; Myron Phelps on "Bible Studies"; Frederic Reed on "The Message of the Bab"; Rallia Ram on "Religion in India"; and Reverend Joseph Motoda on "The Religious Life of Japan".

Despite the eclectic nature of the religious topics discussed and offered for learning at Green Acre, Sarah Farmer was often criticized for the prominence she was now giving to the Bahá'í Faith. This created in her a great deal of stress and her lamentations can be seen in many letters written to her friends. For her, something she was having difficulty making understood to her critics, was that her support of the Bahá'í Faith was not a rejection of other philosophies but rather an embracing of the oneness of all truths and ways of

thought.

There were many that felt that Sarah had betrayed Green Acre by becoming a Bahá'í. The strain that this placed on her was worsened by continuing financial burdens as well as the burning to the ground of her family household in 1904. She finally was forced to move to Melrose, Massachusetts for rest and recovery.

During this tumultuous time in Sarah's life, she was sent letters of encouragement from Abdu'l-Bahá urging her not to be discouraged or grieved and to remain steadfast despite the opposition of others and related trials. He told her of the wonderful things to come and that she must remain patient and endure the wait.

And so, Sarah continued her efforts to achieve peace in the world, most notably by bringing together the Japanese peace envoys to Green Acre in 1905 following the signing of the Russo-Japanese Peace Treaty at the Kittery Navy Yard. In 1906 Helen Ellis Cole died, bequeathing to Green Acre a tract of land and \$12,000 dollars with which to construct Fellowship house (finally erected in 1916).

Other events during the remainder of the decade offered no consolation to her anguish. In 1907 she suffered a fall which was to make her an invalid for the rest of her life. She was continually pressed to surrender her right of trustee appointment over Green Acre. Well meaning friends, misunderstanding her condition placed her in a sanitarium in Portsmouth, New Hampshire and a court battle began for custody.

#### A Reprieve: The First Light of Green Acre as a Bahá'í School

The visit of Abdu'l-Bahá to Green Acre in 1912 was undoubtedly a great consolation to Sarah. It was also the single most important occurrence in Green Acre's history. Five hundred people greeted Him upon arrival. His week long stay underlined the significance of the property and the importance of Sarah's vision for the future.

During His stay at the inn, Abdu'l-Bahá gave public talks that were fundamental to the Bahá'í view of education and human development. He urged His

listeners to study 'reality' so that the union of opinions and expressions may be obtained. Additionally, Abdu'l-Bahá shared with Sarah and others His vision of the future of Green Acre. He said to Sarah as they reviewed to location of the great university her efforts had made possible:

"This is hallowed ground made so by your vision and sacrifice. Always remember this is hallowed ground which I am pointing out to you. This is where the first Bahá'í University will be built; this is where the second Bahá'í Temple in the United States will be raised"

Before 1913, a trust had been established by Phoebe Hearst through her

business agent James C. Hooe to allow Sarah to retain the inn property for as long as her conferences continued. The terms stated that should the programs lapse the property administration would transfer to the Union Trust. In July, 1913 the discontinuation of the programs seemed inevitable because of Sarah's illness. However a group of fellowship members, predominantly Bahá'ís, arranged the summer program without her. The Green Acre by-laws were amended, and William Randall was appointed a trustee. Frank Sanborn and Fillmore Moore opposed the reorganization, feeling that it was an attempt to seize control and establish a Bahá'í Institution. Both the lawsuit that followed and a subsequent appeal to the Maine Supreme Court were decided in favor of the new board of directors, which included six Bahá'ís.

It was following this episode that more Bahá'ís were attracted to Green Acre, and it was at this point the Sarah Farmer was released from her physician's care and returned to live in Eliot, Maine after a six year absence. She died six months later and was buried next to her parents. Although Sarah Farmer did not live to see her institution of learning become what it is today she had laid the groundwork for the first Bahá'í summer school. She undoubtedly was an inspiration to her friend Louise Stapfer who married John Bosch and founded the second Bahá'í summer school in Geyserville, California; and to a Green Acre worker, Seigfried Schopflocher, a Montreal industrialist who founded the first Canadian Bahá'í School at Beaulac [Quebec]. Certainly Sarah Farmer performed a unique service to the Faith...No other resource available to the early Bahá'ís was comparable to the Green Acre forum.

### Green Acre Continues

During the next decade Green Acre was cared for by Harry Randall. Sarah Farmer had entrusted him with this responsibility, knowing his understanding of her vision for the school. Additionally Abdu'l-Bahá had also urged him to assist Green Acre in its growth and purpose. One of the first tests of Harry's administration of the grounds was the decision about whether or not to raise the Peace Flag during WW I. As it was, Juliet Thompson and May Maxwell wanted the flag flown but Harry resisted. Juliet writes about how Harry had gone to his room to nap and later came out looking dazed. He told that he had a vision and realized that he was looking at the war with the eyes of his mind, and once he began to look at war with the eyes of his heart he could hardly stand it for an instant. He then insisted that they raise the flag and everyday pray for the cessation of war.

In 1924 the Eirenion was destroyed by fire. In 1925, Montreal abnegated the privilege of holding the annual Bahá'í Convention to Green Acre and it was that year that the seventeenth Annual Convention was held in Eliot. It was at this

convention that the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í of the United States and Canada was elected for the first time in accordance with the principles outlined by Bahá'u'lláh. A resolution of the convention proposed placing control of the school under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Also that summer a World Unity Conference was held relating to peace, unity, and fellowship among all nations, races, religions, and classes. In December, the first Convention of Unified Action was initiated by the National Spiritual Assembly. In 1925 the first Eliot Local Spiritual Assembly was elected.

The 1930's saw many changes at Green Acre. Under the direction of Dr. Genevieve Coy, the lecture format for classes was changed to a more formal study class, with emphasis on training and inspiring Bahá'í teachers. Classes were taught by Martha Root, Mountfort Mills, George Spendlove, Dorthy Baker, Horace Holley, and Louis Gregory. Guests could also study the "Kitab-i-Iqan" with Elizabeth Greenleaf, "The Dawn Breakers" with Mary Maxwell (now the Hand of the Cause of God Ruhyyih Khanum), and "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh" with Dr. Ali-Kuli Khan.

By 1933 the focus of the national Bahá'í community had become the building of the House of Worship in Wilmette, IL. Fund raisers were held at Green Acre. The educational offerings continued; a pamphlet from those days read:

"There will be opportunity to study Persian and Esperanto. The Arts and Crafts Studio, where most attractive pottery was made last summer, will again be under the direction of Miss Agnes O'Neill. There will be evenings of music and poetry, picnics and social gatherings."

In 1937 Bahá'í Hall was built, supplementing the recreation hall of the Inn, and also replacing the Eirenion as a lecture hall and theatre for the staging of tableaux and concerts. In addition the fourth floor of the Inn was renovated. Although Bahá'í classes were well underway, it was not until 1941 that the school was officially renamed "Green Acre Bahá'í School".

During the 40's the Green Acre hosts of this time were Bahyyih Randall and Harry Ford with much help from Mildred Mottahedeh. Mildred Mottahedeh had arrived at Green Acre for some recovery from pneumonia and as she felt better, began to cook in the kitchen eventually becoming responsible for it. In 1947 the first winter classes were begun by Emanuel (Manny) and Janet Reimer in Rogers Cottage (their home) and all the planning and cooking done by themselves. Eventually as more people came to Green Acre the winter classes were moved to the more spacious facilities at Fellowship House.

During 1949 and 1950 Shoghi Effendi closed Green Acre for two years of "austerity" during the completion of the Bahá'í House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois. It was reopened for the 1951 summer program. In 1952 Abdu'l-Bahá's room was set aside for prayers and meditation through the efforts of Dorothea Morrell [Reed]. The 1960's saw the appointment of the first Green Acre Bahá'í School Council, the first full-time staffperson, Stuart Rhode, and the first

year-round live-in caretaker of Fellowship House, Knight of Bahá'u'lláh Emma Rice.

It was during this time that Douglas Martin and H.T.D. Rost conducted significant historical research on Sarah Farmer, Green Acre, and Monsalvat. In the early 70's when there was a great influx of youth into the Faith, she planned special meetings between significant visitors and the youth. She also winterized and made other improvements to Fellowship House. Ball Cottage was renamed Schopflocher house during this time. Also during the 70s the children's program was named the "Louis Gregory Children's School" and Green Acre acquired its first full time property manager, Edwin Miller. Staples House, the site of Abdu'l-Bahá's unity feast, was finally acquired as a Green Acre property.

During the 1980's Richard Grover was adopted as Green Acre's first full-time administrator. Also, the annual Farmer Family Memorial Lecture series began, with a focus on preserving Green Acre history. The restoration of Green Acre became a specific goal of the Six Year Plan. In 1986 the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'í of the United States made the restoration of the Sarah Farmer Inn a goal for the Bahá'ís of the Northeast. The Association for Bahá'í Studies held its first regional conference at Green Acre. Subsequent A.B.S. conferences have been held each summer since 1983.

Through the end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s restoration of the Sarah Farmer Inn continued for many years as funds became available and was finally completed in summer of 1994; its accommodations are wonderful as it now provides lodging and serves as the main kitchen and dining place of guests.

The administration of Green Acre transferred to Ray Labelle around 1990 and was since handed to James and Jeannine Sacco in 1995-96. Today Green Acre continues to thrive as a year round Bahá'í School drawing people from all around New England, The United States and Canada, and the world. Extensive work on parts of the property have resulted in the creation of a beautiful place to visit and learn about the Bahá'í Faith, including a fully functional Bahá'í bookstore.

Picnics and concerts are often held on the grounds bringing many people to Green Acre for a pleasant day or two of rest and fellowship.

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If you feel that any of this information is incorrect, needs clarification, or you think it could be enhanced in any way please let me know in the guestbook. Keep in mind that this is just a brief history and that complete facts and accounts can be found in the book "Green Acre on the Piscataqua."

I hope you enjoyed reading this document as much as I had creating it and are inspired to visit Green Acre in the near future.

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