



doctrines, or to the variety of churches. In his search for satisfaction, he at one time attended three different church services each Sunday, favouring those of the Unitarian preacher Rev. G.E. Hale, who drew on the scriptures of the "other" great religions. He had begun visiting the library to read on comparative religions.

Bertha and Joe Dobbins introduced Collis and his wife Madge to the Bahá'í Faith in 1944, and when they became Bahá'ís late that year they were among the first "young people", then with only three small children, to enter the Adelaide community. Mr Featherstone quickly set about absorbing knowledge of all aspects of the Faith. When not satisfied with the answers received from individuals or institutions in Australia, he directed his enquiry to the Guardian, who over the years replied in about 20 letters and cables on all manner of subjects.

From 1944 to 1949 the Featherstones assisted mostly in expanding teaching activities in Adelaide. Firesides (with delicious suppers) which started long before they became Bahá'ís, continued at their home in Albert Park. Later there were deepening classes and other meetings in their home, and their physical vigour and spiritual energy gradually affected the entire Adelaide Bahá'í community. When an Assembly was established in Woodville (which included Albert Park) at Ridvan 1948 about 130 guests - including most members of the NSA and nearly all the Bahá'ís in Adelaide - attended a dinner held to celebrate the formation of the first Assembly formed outside Adelaide city, which was reported in the local paper. This success was not Mr Featherstone's alone, but here, and with so many accomplishments later on, his spirit of action was probably the factor that transformed potential for success into real achievement.

In addition to his involvement in local Bahá'í activities, Mr Featherstone served on the teaching committee for South Australia. He regularly visited Kingston with Harold Fitzner, and later visited other country towns which were goal areas. At this time he began to travel interstate more frequently in support of events such as "World Religion Day" - in Melbourne, or some other capital city. For several years the family attended the national Summer School at Yerrinbool, outside Sydney, travelling the 900 miles by car and caravan. Both Mr and Mrs Featherstone contributed talks to the program, and with their children, contributed fully to the life of the summer school.

The Australians and New Zealand Bahá'ís were engaged in their first co-ordinated teaching plan (1947-1953) when Mr Featherstone first went to National convention as a delegate, in 1949. He was

elected to the National Assembly, and was subsequently re-elected annually until 1962. He served as chairman in 1953 and in several of the subsequent years. He assisted the National Assembly, in the period when he was first elected to it, in its handling of complex legal matters concerning Assembly by-laws, foreign and Local Assembly incorporation, and property registration and leasing - which had emerged at the time in addition to the usual matters concerning teaching and administration of the Faith. He was strong, even emphatic, when convening meetings, and with these qualities was able to ensure that business was concluded promptly. He was efficient and considerate of the views of others, yet firm when carrying out decisions. His sense of humour and positive approach aided him in overcoming petty obstacles and difficulties.

The Six Year Plan was completed with jubilation, and with much last-minute effort. The Featherstones did their part by moving to Port Adelaide to help establish the Assembly there. Now, the period in which activities were confined to the home-front were over, and Shoghi Effendi had announced the goals of a ten-year "world encircling Crusade". Collis and Madge attended the New Delhi conference in October. The Australian and New Zealand Bahá'ís were allocated seven "virgin" and six "consolidation" territories to settle in the Asia-Pacific region, and some pioneers moved to their posts following the conference. The Featherstones travelled on to make their pilgrimage to the Holy Shrines in Akka and Haifa, and to meet the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi. This was a unique privilege, to be in Haifa at time when the Guardian was receiving word of the movement of those pioneers he named "Knights of Bahá'u'lláh". The Featherstones asked as many questions as possible to guide them in their services in the coming decade, and they returned to Australia brimming with energy.

Mr Featherstone immersed himself in the administration regional expansion. Notwithstanding commitments with work and family (after four daughters, a son was born in September 1954), he became secretary of the Asian Teaching Committee, the National Assembly's major committee responsible for the dispersment and welfare of pioneers. The committee's newsletter "Koala News", distributed from 1954 until the formation of the South Pacific Regional Assembly in 1959, was treasured by the pioneers as a source of encouragement and news, and the latest instructions from Shoghi Effendi. An important message that arrived in Adelaide during the day would be typed out by Madge, and roneoed and rushed to the Post Office by Collis for posting before midnight. Where committee responsibilities ended, the

Featherstones worked personally to assist.

In 1954 Clara Dunn appointed her first two Auxiliary Board Members for Australasia - Collis Featherstone and Thelma Perks, who became responsible for protection and propagation of the Bahá'í Faith in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific region. Clara Dunn received letters from the Hands of the Cause in the Holy Land explaining which activities Shoghi Effendi felt were most important for herself and her Board Members to undertake in the period immediately ahead. In June 1954, for instance, they informed her that during the second phase of the Crusade, which was to last from 1954-1956, the major tasks to be accomplished by the Hands, the Auxiliary Boards, and National Spiritual Assemblies, included the acquisition of Temple sites (the Sydney site had already been purchased) and of National Headquarters (including one in Auckland, and another in Suva); the maintenance of victories already won; the multiplication of Bahá'í Centres; the expansion of literature; the purchase of national endowments; the incorporation of Assemblies; and the establishment of Publishing Trusts.

As a member of the Asian Teaching Committee, the National Assembly, and the Auxiliary Board, Mr Featherstone was at the heart of efforts to communicate the vital needs of the time to the Bahá'í community. The Guardian had specifically requested that the Board Members encourage individuals and Assemblies through correspondence and personal visits, and assist in fostering amongst them the sense of unity regarded as essential to the attraction of spiritual assistance. They were, furthermore, to encourage contributions to the various funds, so that the community's many important activities could be carried forward. The Guardian gave general instructions such as these while leaving the details of the functioning of Auxiliary Boards to the various Hands of the Cause. There were no rules of procedure, and the Hands on each continent were free to determine their own modes operation. They were advised to send news of achievements to Haifa, but to settle for themselves questions of rules, regulations and procedure.

Until 1957 Mr Featherstone and Thelma Perks assisted Clara Dunn in every possible way. They wrote reports to the Guardian on her behalf, and travelled frequently and extensively visiting the Pacific pioneers and the first Pacific Island Bahá'ís. Mr Featherstone re-arranged his business affairs so as to allow himself greater freedom for travel. In late December 1954 he travelled to Suva and Auckland on the first of a great many Pacific Island trips. At this time, his task was to inspire and encourage the isolated pioneers - most of whom were

living and working for the Faith in intensely difficult circumstances - and to deepen the Islanders who were being attracted into the Cause. Later, as a Hand of the Cause, he had to explain the nature of the Bahá'í teachings to government officials and religious leaders, and solve difficulties as they occurred within the infant Bahá'í communities.

In October 1957 Shoghi Effendi appointed a "third contingent" of Hands of the Cause, comprising Enoch Olinga, William Sears, John Robarts in West and South West Africa, Hasan Balyuzi & John Ferraby in British Isles; Abu'l-Qasim Faizi in the Arabian Peninsula, and H. Collis Featherstone and Rahmatu'llah Muhajir in the Pacific. With his appointment as a Hand of the Cause, and news of Shoghi Effendi's untimely passing one month later, Mr Featherstone's previous services, no matter how zealously carried out, paled in significance to the challenges ahead: he was now one of the "chief stewards" of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Order, who now held supreme and grave responsibilities for the protection and upliftment of the Cause of God. Mr Featherstone travelled with Clara Dunn to Haifa for the first convocation of the Hands, and shared with the other Hands the anguish that accompanied the realisation that Shoghi Effendi had not left a will. As the Chief Stewards, the Hands guided the Bahá'í world to complete the Ten Year Crusade goals. They announced after their 1959 conclave that the Universal House of Justice would be both elected and established on Mount Carmel at Ridvan 1963. The Hands of the Cause ruled themselves ineligible for election to the supreme institution and Collis resigned from the Australian National Spiritual Assembly in September 1962.

The Hands of the Cause now took responsibility for the completion of the goals of the Ten Year Crusade. Initially, Mr Featherstone's responsibilities continued to be mostly in the Australasian region. The Bahá'í communities in numerous Pacific Islands worked toward the goal of establishing a Regional Assembly for the South Pacific, which was formed in Suva in 1959. The role of the Hand seemed to have no limits: cabling encouraging words to conferences, summer schools, and conventions; pointing to the comparative success of new communities (in July 1960 Australia was struggling to hold 28 Local Spiritual Assemblies, while the South Pacific had already established 37); encouraging prominent Bahá'í speakers to visit the Pacific Islands as they passed through the region from Asia to North America; cabling money to aid pioneers and communities which had been devastated by natural disasters (such as Bertha Dobbins, whose school in Port Vila was affected by a cyclone in 1960) or to assist pioneers to remain at remote posts at which

there was no possibility of gaining employment (thus allowing Jean Sevin to lengthen his stay on Loyalty Island in 1961); informing Assemblies of the fate of churches and clerics who had attacked the Faith (such as the South Australian Anglican paper that fell into financial and legal difficulties soon after it had printed an unfavourable article); overseeing the work of Auxiliary Board Members; consulting with National Assemblies; conveying progress reports to the Hands in the Holy Land.

When John Robarts became ill in 1961, Mr Featherstone took his place at the inaugural conventions of the Bahá'ís of Nicaragua and Honduras. For the first time he was travelling beyond the Asia-Pacific region to represent the Hands of the Cause. As usual, he visited Bahá'í communities while both approaching and departing Central America: in Suva he presented members of the South Pacific Regional Assembly with a curtain from the Shrine of the Bab. During the following year, many goals of the Ten Year Plan remained to be completed, and Mr Featherstone travelled extensively. Indicative of the pace at which he travelled, was an itinerary between October 3 and November 12, to Sydney, Noumea, Vila, Suva, Tonga, Suva again, Apia, Pago Pago, Nadi, Auckland, Christchurch, and Melbourne, during which he spoke to Prime Ministers, gave firesides, and consulted institutions: this was the pattern that he repeated for another three decades.

Mr Featherstone absorbed the Bahá'í writings, and drew on when speaking. When embarked on a tour, he pursued specific themes drawn from messages of Shoghi Effendi and later from the Universal House of Justice. He counselled on the urgency of teaching, and on the necessity for obedience to the institutions. His intelligence was of a practical nature, and he drew on personal experience to know the condition of society. He installed a powerful world-band radio on which to receive news broadcast from around the globe. He was a practical and methodical man who at all times radiated joy. He not only had vision and foresight, but the ability to think projects through from beginning to end (when he designed and made a die he had to be able to visualize at the beginning the finished product he would end up with). He was not a spur of the moment man - he was a practical planner - but nevertheless could act quickly and decisively when necessary. He spoke with authority and inspired confidence. Across almost three decades he represented the Universal House of Justice at such significant Bahá'í events as the dedication of Mashriqu'l-Adhkars, formation of new National Spiritual Assemblies, and the convening of international conferences; he negotiated with heads of states and governments to secure the protection or the rights of Bahá'í communities; on equally numerous occasions he visited

governmental and religious leaders as special representative of the Universal House of Justice. He attended many of the most significant conferences held in the past four decades: the New Delhi (1953) and Sydney (1958) Conferences associated with the World Crusade; those in Sydney (1967), Singapore, Suva, and Sapporo (1971) associated with the Nine Year Plan (1964-73); in Anchorage (July 1976), and Auckland (1977) associated with the Five Year Plan (1974-1979); and Canberra and Dublin (1982) in the middle of the Seven Year Plan (1979-1986). In addition, Mr Featherstone attended the first National Convention held in Uganda (1963), and represented the Universal House of Justice at the inaugural national conventions of the South West Pacific Ocean (1964), Gilbert and Ellice Islands (1967), Papua New Guinea (1969), Samoa (1970), Northwest Pacific Ocean (1972), Marshall Islands (1977), and Tuvalu (1981).

During the Nine-year plan the work of the Hands of the Cause increased dramatically, and Mr Featherstone maintained an 18 member Auxiliary Board (9 for Propagation, 9 for protection), spread throughout the Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific. With the appointment of a three-member Continental Board of Counsellors in 1968 - which assumed all responsibility for the Boards - he was freer to travel beyond the Asia-Pacific region. In the 1970s the Featherstones travelled world-wide several times to visit Bahá'í communities in East and Southern Africa, the Indian ocean, East Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

In 1976 the Universal House of Justice expressed to Mr Featherstone its hope that he could devote all his energies to Bahá'í duties. He sold his business and moved to Rockhampton in North Queensland, while the punishing pace of travel continued unabated. In 1979, for instance, the Featherstones undertook a 76-day journey through 10-nations in the Asia-Pacific region. They had come to know Bahá'ís in a multitude of different cultures, visited remote villages under the most arduous circumstances of climate, food, transportation and accommodation. On 29 September 1990 Mr Featherstone, succumbed to a heart attack and died in Kathmandu, Nepal. Several days later his children Margaret, Joan, Kay, Mariette and Jeff, and other family members and representatives of National Assemblies, joined Madge for his burial at the "rooftop of the world" against a Himalayan sky. He joined the distinguished company of fellow Hands of the Cause John Esslemont, Keith Ransom-Kehler, Martha Root, Clara and Hyde Dunn, Dorothy Baker, A.Q. Faizi, Rahmat Muhajir, Aldebert Muhlschlegel, Leroy Ioas, Paul Haney, and Ugo Giachary, who also died far from their native lands in the path of service to Bahá'u'lláh.

Mr Featherstone "focused much energy on reinvigorating the long-suffering friends in war-ravaged Vietnam." (UHJ Rid90). The Universal House of Justice cabled: "Deeply grieved announce passing valiant Hand Cause God Collis Featherstone while visiting Kathmandu Nepal course extensive journey Asia. His notable accomplishments as staunch fearless defender covenant his unceasing commitment propagation Cause all parts world especially Pacific region his unremitting perseverance fostering establishment local national institutions administrative order his exemplary devotion to writings Faith his outstanding personal qualities unswerving loyalty enthusiasm zeal and dedication distinguish his manifold services throughout many decades offering prayers holy shrines bountiful reward his radiant soul Abha Kingdom advice friends everywhere hold befitting memorial gatherings particularly in Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs recognition magnificent achievements".

#### Bibliography

Australian Bahá'í Bulletin (various numbers 1944-1990)

Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, 1971.

#### METADATA

Views15591 views since posted 2000; last edit 2025-04-04 14:50 UTC;

previous at [archive.org.../hassall\\_colis\\_featherstone](https://archive.org.../hassall_colis_featherstone);  
URLs changed in 2010, see [archive.org.../bahai-library.org](https://archive.org.../bahai-library.org)

Language

English

Permission

author

Share

Shortlink: [bahai-library.com/158](https://bahai-library.com/158)

Citation: ris/158

select Collection:

Archives

Articles

Articles-unpublished

Audio

Bibliographies

BIC

Biographies

Books

Chronologies

Compilations

Compilations-NSA  
Compilations-personal  
Documents  
East-asia  
Encyclopedia  
Essays  
Etc  
Excerpts  
Fiction  
Glossaries  
Guardian  
Histories  
Introductory  
Letters  
Maps  
Music  
Newspapers  
NSA-documents  
NSA-letters  
Personal  
Pilgrims  
Poetry  
Presentations  
Resources  
Reviews  
Scripts  
Software  
Statistics  
Study  
Talks  
Theses  
Transcripts  
Translations  
UHJ-documents  
UHJ-letters  
Video  
Visual  
Writings  
  
home  
  
sitemap  
  
series  
  
chronology  
  
search:  
author

[title](#)

[date](#)

[tags](#)

[adv. search](#)

[languages](#)

[inventory](#)

[bibliography](#)

[abbreviations](#)

[links](#)

[about](#)

[contact](#)

[RSS](#)

[new](#)

— H. Collis Featherstone (Used by permission of the curator)