



possible sources were used to collect the information for the Registry. The project got underway in October 1986 and is expected to be completed during the Summer of 1987.

#### Parameters of the data

While I strove to include as much information of each individual as possible, I realized that the following components should constitute the minimum amount of information:

1. Names (first, maiden, last);
2. Titles (Dr., Miss, etc.);
3. Place and date of declaration of his or her Faith, or enrollment in the Bahá'í community;
4. Earliest and last known date in Canada (which may or may not coincide with date of declaration or of death);
5. Name of foremost community associated with that individual;
6. Annotations provided mainly by interviews with early believers;
7. A listing of sources consulted for each of the above items of information to guide researchers and biographers.

More recently, I have started to collect occupational data on the early believers.

#### Sources Consulted

The Registry is notable for the wide range of sources consulted, many hitherto unknown or relatively unexplored. These include archival materials, unpublished documents, published accounts, and oral histories.

The Bahá'í National Archives of the United States in Wilmette, and those of Canada in Thornhill have yielded approximately 10,000 pages of primary materials. The most important of these include the Corinne True Papers, the Alfred E. Lunt Collection, the Windust Papers, and scores of regional histories written before 1944. Mr. Roger Dahl who also has an interest in the development of a Registry, has provided a good measure of assistance in the project.

While the archival materials are found in a few restricted areas, unpublished documents come from a great variety of sources, both institutional and individual. In some instances, early believers have been asked to present talks at Bahá'í Summer Schools and the like; we are fortunate that some have taken the effort of putting their talk to paper. With the renewed interest in Bahá'í scholarship, Canada, and the United States in particular, has seen the rise of local historians who possess at least a great deal of enthusiasm, often a rare ability to ferret out improbable facts, and only occasionally an inability to understand the use of documented facts. All this will develop in good time.

Many Bahá'ís are most familiar with published accounts. The Registry is consulting approximately 300 titles for all references to early

Canadian Bahá'ís. This category includes biographies, published letters from Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, and certainly Bahá'í journals: Bahá'í News, Bahá'í Canada (and its predecessor, Canadian Bahá'í News), Star of the West, Bahá'í Magazine, to list some of the more important ones.

Oral histories constitute the fourth source of information. The author has already begun a process of seeking out early believers, to secure not only oral histories, but also to direct specific questions related to a tentative Registry. While only a very few were able to provide a great deal of fresh information, virtually all of these believers provided some new data which, together with other such believers, will constitute a fairly complete Registry. When the Registry achieves a niveau of accuracy and reliability, the revised list will once again be sent to all of these believers for additional comments.

### Methodological Problems

Methodological problems in developing the Registry center around two chief areas: (1) individual biography, and (2) the varying conditions of the early Canadian Bahá'í Community.

Every historian has encountered the problem of the traditional position of women. The search for the identity of Mrs. John Thomas is universal. Early accounts, as was customary in those days, would be satisfied with no more detailed description of Mrs. Thomas. Many of the early Bahá'í accounts reflect this style of biographical referencing. A remarried woman may, in fact, prop up three times in such accounts. First, as a trammled single woman, then as a blushing bride of a first husband, finally as a deadpan wife of a second husband after the first husband's demise. Many of those who were called in by the author to help with the Registry were asked to identify women.

The second, important, problem concerns the nature of early Bahá'í communities in Canada (as elsewhere). It revolves around the question of "who is a Bahá'í?" Often, sympathetic friends of the Bahá'í Faith took part in almost as many Bahá'í functions as Bahá'ís themselves, receiving due credit in Bahá'í publications. In addition, the process of declaring oneself a Bahá'í was not only less formal than today, but the leadtime between "declaration" and "enrollment in the Bahá'í community" was also considerably longer. Some believers simply considered themselves a believer and criteria were quite loose. Other never felt the need to enroll in the Bahá'í community, although they certainly had declared.

Then, as so often happens, the most active members of the community are more "newsworthy" than the inactive ones. What possible route can we employ to uncover the latter ones? Oral interviews have proven to be one of the best

ways.

## Some Findings

Almost from the very beginning of the project, we were forced to recognize that much of the accepted knowledge of the early Canadian Bahá'ís had to be revised. First, there were a great deal more believers than official accounts indicated. A good example is the information which appears in a 1987 publication of the National Spiritual Assembly, which herebelow is compared to the numbers according to the Registry:

Table 1

A Comparison of the Number of Early Believers in Canada

Publication Registry Difference

1893

1902

1910

1920

1930

1935

1945

The proportion of the 333 names in the Registry for 1893 and 1944 indicate the following proportion of men and women (see Table 2)

Table 2

Percentage of men and women in the Registry and in the contemporary Bahá'í community

Men Women

Registry

Bahá'í Community

(1987)

We were also able to give a profile of the civil status of many early believers, which is found in Table 3.

Table 3

Percentage of believers in various Civil Status categories

Men Women

Married

Single

Unable to determine

We also determined the residence of the early believers. While it is true that some have managed to live in different communities, they have often indicated the place where they declared their belief as the "home" community. Others did not identify themselves as such and we have therefore, for

statistical purposes only, divided them across their respective communities. Table 4 and 5 indicate residence by community and by province respectively, compared to current statistics.

Table 4  
Percentage Distribution of Early Believers  
by Major "Home" Community

Registry Bahá'í Community (1987)

Greater Montreal  
Vancouver  
Saint John, N.B.  
Toronto  
Hamilton  
All other

Total % 100 % 100 %

Table 5  
Percentage Distribution of Early Believers  
by Major Provinces

Registry Bahá'í Community (1987)

Québec  
Ontario  
B.C.  
New Brunswick  
Manitoba  
Saskatchewan  
Alberta  
Nova Scotia  
Newfoundland  
Prince Edward Island

Total % 100 % 100 %

Impact of the Registry

It is too early to clearly delineate implications of the Registry in the study of the Canadian Bahá'í Community. However, the following few issues come to our mind. First, various ethnic, language, and regional groups in Canada may derive some benefit from exploring the Registry. How well is it known that the first Black Canadian Bahá'í was Eliot of Montreal (variously spelled as "Elliott")? Does French Canada Bahá'í History begin with the declaration of .....? whose main contribution was to the Australian Bahá'í Community in the form of a permanent summer school? How well is it known that Bahá'ís could be found in Canada's peripheral areas, such as New Brunswick? The practical importance of the Registry, however, has already been clearly evidenced by the use to which it has been put by the still-living early

believers. Not infrequently, the Registry has allowed these believers to remember and reflect more accurately on the life and works which they have built up for us with their erstwhile soulmates. In that sense, the author has more than once hoped that such believers will be encouraged to either start writing their biographies, or to complete them as quickly as possible, in time for the first Centenary of the Faith in Canada in 1993.

## METADATA

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