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Centennial of Abdu'l-Baha's Visit to Dublin

by Ian Aldrich

In the summer of 1912 Dublin residents welcomed an unexpected visitor: Abdu'l-Baha, the leading figure of the Baha'i Faith and son of its founder. At the time, Abdu'l-Baha was just a few years removed from four decades of prison and had embarked on a 239-day tour of North America. His three-week stay in Dublin was his longest single visit during his travels.

Throughout 2012, the Dublin Inn* has marked the 100th anniversary of Abdu'l-Baha's visit to the area. As the only surviving building where Abdu'l-Baha stayed, the property has long been a point of pride for Baha'is around the world. In 2001 the Inn was purchased by a Baha'i couple, Robert Cook

* Located next to the General Store and later known as French's Tavern. (Not to be confused with the building now owned by Phoenix House on Pierce Road, which was also known as the Dublin Inn.)



Abdu'l-Baha, 1912. Photograph by Elise Pumpelly Cabot.

and Gisu Mohadjer of Washington D.C. They donated the building to the National Baha'i organization in 2005.

Over the last year the Inn has hosted 23 devotional gatherings, one for each day of Abdu'l-Baha's visit. In August there was a presentation by filmmaker Dr. Anne Perry, in which she introduced her film, *Luminous Journey*, about Abdu'l-Baha's travels in America.

In addition, a centennial celebration of Abdu'l-Baha's appearance at the Dublin Community Church was held on August 12th. The event featured a talk by Gisu Mohadjer Cook, who discussed the history of the Baha'i Faith in Dublin. She is currently working with Nancy Reimer, a Peterborough resident and the great-granddaughter of George de Forest Brush, on a small booklet about the Faith's history in the town.

In all, the Dublin Inn has welcomed more than 600 visitors from 18 states and 14 countries to mark the centennial.

One Hundred Years Ago

ABDU'L-BAHA arrived in New Hampshire on July 25th with little fanfare, traveling by train from Boston to Harrisville with a small staff. His visit had come courtesy of Mrs. Agnes Parsons, a Dublin summer resident and early member of the Baha'i Faith who lived with her husband, Jeffrey, in Washington D.C. The Parsons family owned several properties in town, including a large summer home called "Ty-ny-Maes" (Welsh for "house in the meadow") on Windmill Hill Road. (The home stood at the eastern end of the field of what is now the Sistare property.)

Their other holdings included the family "farmhouse"



"Dayspring," later known as "Jubilee Farm,"
burned down in 1982

known as "Dayspring," which sat down the hill and, having been recently built, afforded a range of modern conveniences, from electric lights to telephones to baths. Abdu'l-Baha was first housed here. Wishing to be closer to town and, it was later suggested, seeking a better night's sleep, he moved to the Willcox Inn and later to the Dublin Inn to finish out his stay.

Upon her guest's arrival, Mrs. Parsons suggested that Abdu'l-Baha's visit be kept a secret, at least for the first few days. Rest was certainly on the docket for the 68-year-old spiritual leader, but Abdu'l-Baha refused his host's suggestion, telling her, "We have come for work and service and not for leisure."

Indeed, Abdu'l-Baha seems to have maintained a busy schedule. Throughout much of his stay, he spoke at Mrs. Parsons' home twice each afternoon, at 5:15 and then again at 5:45. As she later wrote in her diary, published in 1996 as a book, *Abdu'l-Baha in America: Agnes Parson's Diary*, "about 75 people" came to listen to her guest on August 1. His talks focused on the Baha'i Faith and its aims for universal peace, the elimination of prejudice, universal education, and the equality of women and men.

His presence was felt outside the Parsons' home as well. The *Peterborough Transcript* reported that "the venerable Persian, Abdu'l-Baha bears so much resemblance to the pictured Santa Claus that two little tots begged to take out their go-car and get it filled with presents from him. They had espied the supposed Santa Claus sitting on the piazza of the



The Dublin Inn, c. 1900, now owned by the National Baha'i organization



The Willcox Inn, c. 1905, was opposite the fire station, near the corner of Route 101 and Dublin Road.
The Inn was torn down in the late 1930s.

Willcox Inn and felt that the opportunity was too good not to be improved.”

Elsewhere, residents revered him for his kindness. During his stay at the Dublin Inn, a woman visitor told Howard Colby Ives, a Unitarian minister who had come to stay with him in Dublin, about witnessing Abdu'l-Baha's encounter with an older, disheveled looking gentleman.

“His trousers particularly were filthy and barely covered his limbs,” Ives recalled the woman telling him. “Abdu'l-Baha talked with him for a few moments. His face a smiling benediction. He seemed to be trying to cheer the old man and finally there did appear the trace of a smile, but it was rather bleak. Abdu'l-Baha's eyes swept the pitiable figure and then He laughed gently. He said something to the effect that the old man's trousers were not very serviceable and that we must remedy that lack. It was very early in the morning and the street deserted. My friend, watching, saw Abdul Baha step into the shadow of the porch and He seemed to be fumbling under His Aba at the waist. Then He stooped. His trousers dropped to the ground. He gathered his robe about Him and turning handed the trousers to the old man. ‘May God go with you,’ He said, and turned to the secretary as if nothing unusual had happened.”

Abdu'l-Baha also maintained a healthy social schedule. He met with several members of the Dublin summer colony, watched tennis at the Dublin Lake Club, and attended Joseph

Lindon Smith's annual play at Loon Point. One of the performers in the play, Nancy Brush Pearmain, the oldest daughter of painter George de Forest Brush, remembers being struck by the presence of the famous Persian. He looked “as though the Bible had opened and he had stepped out of it,” she later recalled. Abdu'l-Baha also visited Brush Farm, traveling by foot to the painter's house for tea.

Two Important Appearances

During his time in Dublin Abdu'l-Baha delivered two high-profile talks. The first of those took place at the Parsons' boathouse (now owned by the Dublin School) on Dublin Lake. In attendance that day were the African-American servants who worked in town. In an age when interracial marriage was still illegal in several states, Abdu'l-Baha spoke about the upcoming wedding of two young Baha'is, Louis Gregory, an African-American lawyer, and a white English woman named Louisa Matthews. Additionally, he discussed at length the importance of fostering better relations between the races.

Toward the end of his visit, on August 11th, Abdu'l-Baha was invited by Dublin's minister, the Rev. Josiah L. Seward, to speak at the Unitarian Church (now the Dublin Community

Save the Date: Our Winter Potluck Supper will be held on
February 8, 2013 at the Community Church.

Abdu'l-Baha and the Baha'i Faith

When Abdu'l-Baha came to Dublin, New Hampshire, in July of 1912, he was 68 years old. Most of his life had been spent in prison with his family, because his father, Baha'u'llah ("the Glory of God"), a Persian nobleman by birth, had proclaimed himself God's Messenger for this age, a Divine Teacher bearing a Revelation from God that addressed humanity's present day needs, a Revelation meant to unite the peoples of the world. Baha'u'llah explained that the founders of the major religions were all a part of a single process by which God revealed His will for humanity and that the teachings of these Messengers of God have always been the cause of human progress and the advancement of civilization.

This Revelation of Baha'u'llah was either ignored or rejected by the Persian authorities and religious leaders of His day and so He, with His family, was exiled, eventually to the Holy Land, Palestine, where they were imprisoned for 40 years until the young Turks freed them in the Revolution of 1908.

Baha'u'llah designated his eldest son, Abdu'l-Baha, the Perfect Exemplar of His teachings and the Perfect Interpreter of His Words. Abdu'l-Baha lived a life of service to his Father and proclaimed the basic principles of the Baha'i Faith (as it is known today) to be: the oneness of God; the oneness of mankind; the common foundation of all religions; the independent investigation of truth; the elimination of all prejudice; the equality of men and women; a universal auxiliary language; universal education; and the harmony of science and religion. When asked about his purpose for traveling in America, Abdu'l-Baha said, "I have come to America to raise the standard of universal peace and to bring unity among mankind."

Worldwide, there are today some 5 million adherents to the Baha'i Faith in 189 countries and 46 territories. The Faith is guided by a nine-member House of Justice at the world headquarters in Haifa, Israel. The United States headquarters are in Wilmette, Illinois.

— Nancy Reimer

(Centennial continued)

Church), an event that attracted some 300 people. Abdu'l-Baha's friend, Howard Colby Ives, gushed over the speaker's presence:

"His cream colored robe; His white hair and beard; His radiant smile and courteous demeanor," Ives later wrote. "And His gestures! Never a dogmatic downward stroke of the hand; never an upraised warning finger; never the assumption of teacher to the taught. But always the encouraging upward swing of hands, as though He would actually lift us up with them. And His voice! Like a resonant bell of finest timbre; never loud but of such penetrating quality that the walls of the room seemed to vibrate with its music."

On Abdu'l-Baha's final full day in Dublin, Mrs. Parsons hosted a concert at her house to mark his departure and say goodbye to her famous guest. A number of local residents attended the party, at which Abdu'l-Baha thanked his hosts for their hospitality and reminded his listeners why he'd traveled so far to see them. "I have explained every question for

you, delivered to you the message of God, expounded the mysteries of the divine Books for you, proved the immortality of the spirit and the oneness of truth and expounded for you economic questions and divine teachings."

That night he had a late dinner at the home of Raphael Pumpelly at which the small group exchanged funny stories and laughed heartily. Later, as Agnes Parsons drove him back to the Inn, he asked her, "Now you are all pleased with me?" His host was struck by the question and his sincerity.

"He was so utterly kind," she later wrote in her diary, "and made so happy these last moments at Dublin."

News from the Archives

We announce with great pleasure that our newest board member, Lisa Foote, has agreed to take over John Harris's job as Archivist, when he retires next spring.

Rosemary Mack has finished transcribing James A. Mason's 1854 diary, and is now doing the letters that Joseph Lindon Smith and his brother Albert wrote home from Paris in 1889. Having transcripts not only makes these documents easier to read, but preserves the rather fragile originals.

It's that time of year . . . please use the enclosed stamped dues envelope to send us your 2013 pledge of support. We are grateful for your contribution to preserving Dublin's history.