

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Travels to the West

**Dedicating the Temple Land
Wilmette, Illinois, USA, 1912**

Travels of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá 15

Bahá'í House of Worship for North America

The Bahá'í Faith was introduced to the United States at the Parliament of the World's Religions meeting in Chicago in 1893. By 1900, there were nearly 1,000 Bahá'ís living in the U.S. and Canada.

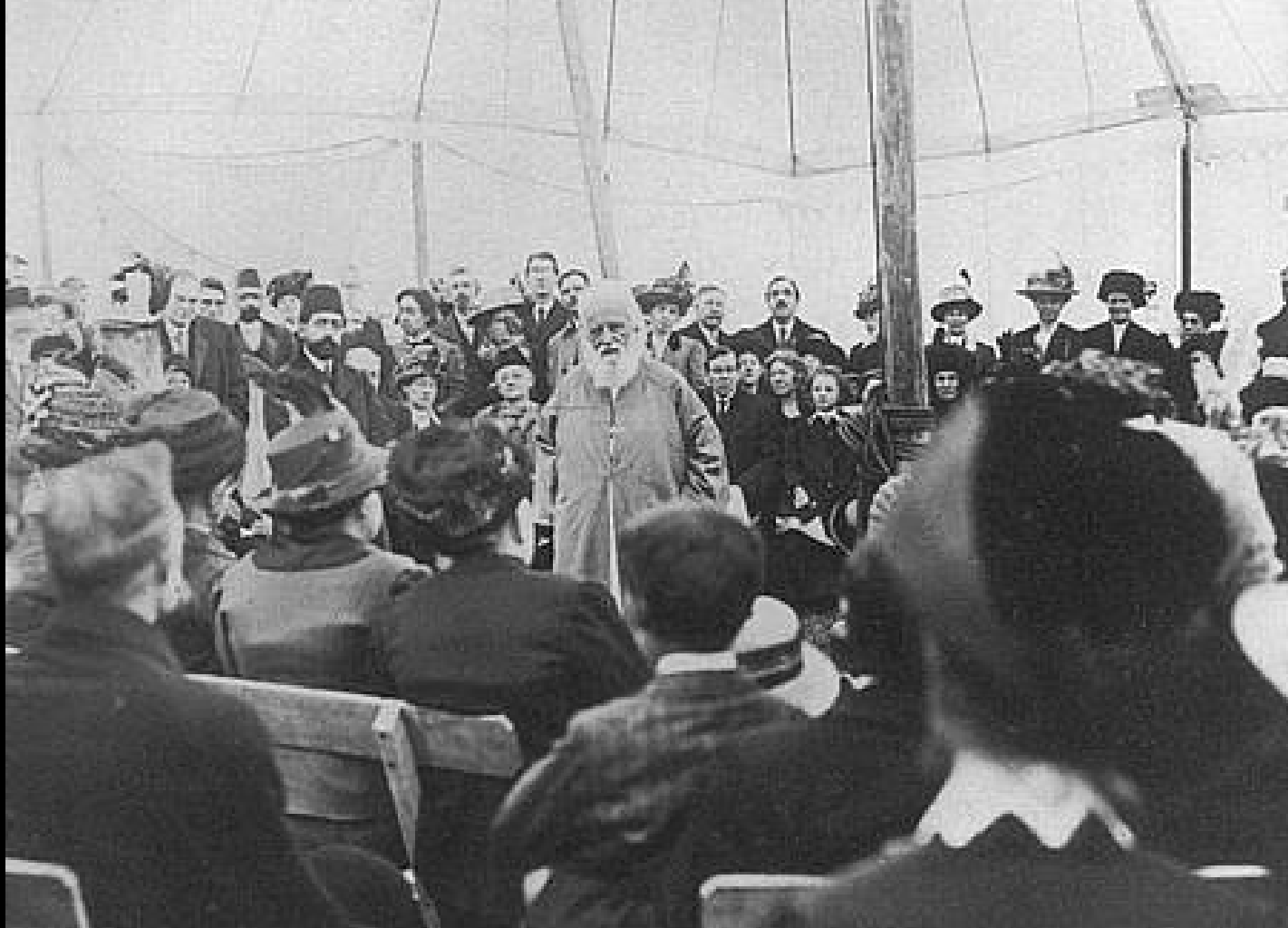
Revised from <http://www.architecture.org/learn/resources/buildings-of-chicago/building/bahai-house-of-worship/>

Bahá'í House of Worship for North America

Plans to construct a Bahá'í temple in the Chicago area emerged in 1903, but it would be another 50 years before the temple was finished. Two lots were purchased along Lake Michigan in 1907, in what was then Grosse Pointe (now Wilmette).

Bahá'í House of Worship for North America

'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived in Chicago on 29 April and stayed until 6 May. On 1 May 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá dedicated the temple land, the site of the future House of Worship. A tent had been erected on the property, and He first gave a talk.



'Abdu'l-Bahá speaking in the tent erected on the property

Talk at Dedication of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár Grounds Wilmette, Illinois, 1 May 1912

The power which has gathered you here today notwithstanding the cold and windy weather is, indeed, mighty and wonderful. It is the power of God, the divine favor of Bahá'u'lláh which has drawn you together. We praise God that through His constraining love human souls are assembled and associated in this way.

Talk at Dedication of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár Grounds Wilmette, Illinois, 1 May 1912

Thousands of Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, dawning points of praise and mention of God for all religionists will be built in the East and in the West, but this, being the first one erected in the Occident, has great importance.

(Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace, 30)

Talk at Dedication of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár Grounds Wilmette, Illinois, 1 May 1912

In the future there will be many here and elsewhere—in Asia, Europe, even in Africa, New Zealand and Australia—but this edifice in Chicago is of especial significance. It has the same importance as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in 'Ishqábád, Caucasus, Russia, the first one built there.'

Bahá'í House of Worship for North America

After the talk 'Abdu'l-Bahá, followed by His audience, left the tent and requested that Nettie Tobin's stone (a simple stone that had been brought earlier by this poor old lady as her offering) be brought to Him. The stone had been lying several feet northwest of the tent and had probably been pointed out to Him by Corinne True earlier.

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He walked back and forth on the property and, after asking where the center of the land would be, turned to someone who showed Him the approximate point.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá finding the center of the land

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As the stone was being carried to where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stood, Irene Holmes of New York stepped forward and handed Him a leather case. Inside was a golden trowel she had hoped would be used for laying a cornerstone within the foundation of the building.

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'Abdu'l-Bahá tried to use the trowel to dig a resting place for the dedication stone, but it was too dull to cut through the spring grass. He placed the trowel in its case and asked for more practical tools.

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Bahá'í House of Worship for North America

When it was discovered that plans had not been made to have such tools available, one of the young men ran to a nearby house to borrow an ax. “Like an athlete”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá took it and “swung it high in the air.” “After several blows,” wrote Louise Waite, He “cut through the resisting turf and reached the earth below.”



'Abdu'l-Bahá dedicating the site, Wilmette, USA, 1912

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The scene inspired the Bahá'ís to sing-first the “Benediction” and then “Tell the Wondrous Story,” both written by Mrs. Waite. In the meantime another young man, Herbert Anderson of Chicago, had run west in search of a shovel.

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He found a work crew on the Northwestern Elevated tracks about four blocks south, and convinced them to loan him one of their shovels, which he whisked back to the ceremony. As the shovel was handed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Corinne True reportedly stepped forward and encouraged Him to let a woman participate in the ceremony.

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Turning to Lua Getsinger, He bade her to come forward despite her resistance. It was not until He called her a second time that she responded, grasped the shovel, and turned the first earth.

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Bahá'í House of Worship for North America

Following her was Corinne True, after which, one by one, individuals of many races and nationalities - Persian, Syrian, Egyptian, Indian, North American Indian, Japanese, South African, English, French, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Jewish - were called forward to participate in the digging.



Digging the hole to place the dedication stone, 1912

Now that a rather large hole had been dug, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reached down and scooped up handfuls of dirt, which He shared with several individuals.



Bahá'í House of Worship for North America

Then He “*consigned the stone to its excavation, on behalf of all the people of the world.*” After retrieving the golden trowel, He pushed the earth back around the stone and declared: “*The Temple is already built.*”

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House of
Worship

Wilmette
USA

Dedicated
1953

