

Djibouti (French Somaliland)

Africa

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Geography - Djibouti

Africa

Similarly, if possible, they should travel to the continent of Africa, Canary Islands, Cape Verde Islands, Madeira Islands, Réunion Islands, St. Helena, Zanzibar, Mauritius, etc., and in those countries summon the people to the Kingdom of God and raise the cry of “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá!” They must also upraise the flag of the oneness of the world of humanity in the island of Madagascar. It is said that in South Africa, a diamond mine is discovered.... Perchance, God willing, the mine of humanity may be discovered and the brilliant pearls of the Kingdom be found.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. Tablet to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, 11 April 1916)

Djibouti (French Somaliland)

The Republic of Djibouti in the Horn of Africa has an area of 23,200 km², with Somalia to the south, Ethiopia to the southwest, Eritrea in the north, and the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden to the east. It became the colony of French Somaliland in 1883, before becoming independent in 1977. The population today is over 970,000, with 94% Moslem, but was 25,000 in 1953. French and Arabic are the two official languages. It is a significant port, providing access to Ethiopia, and has several foreign military bases.

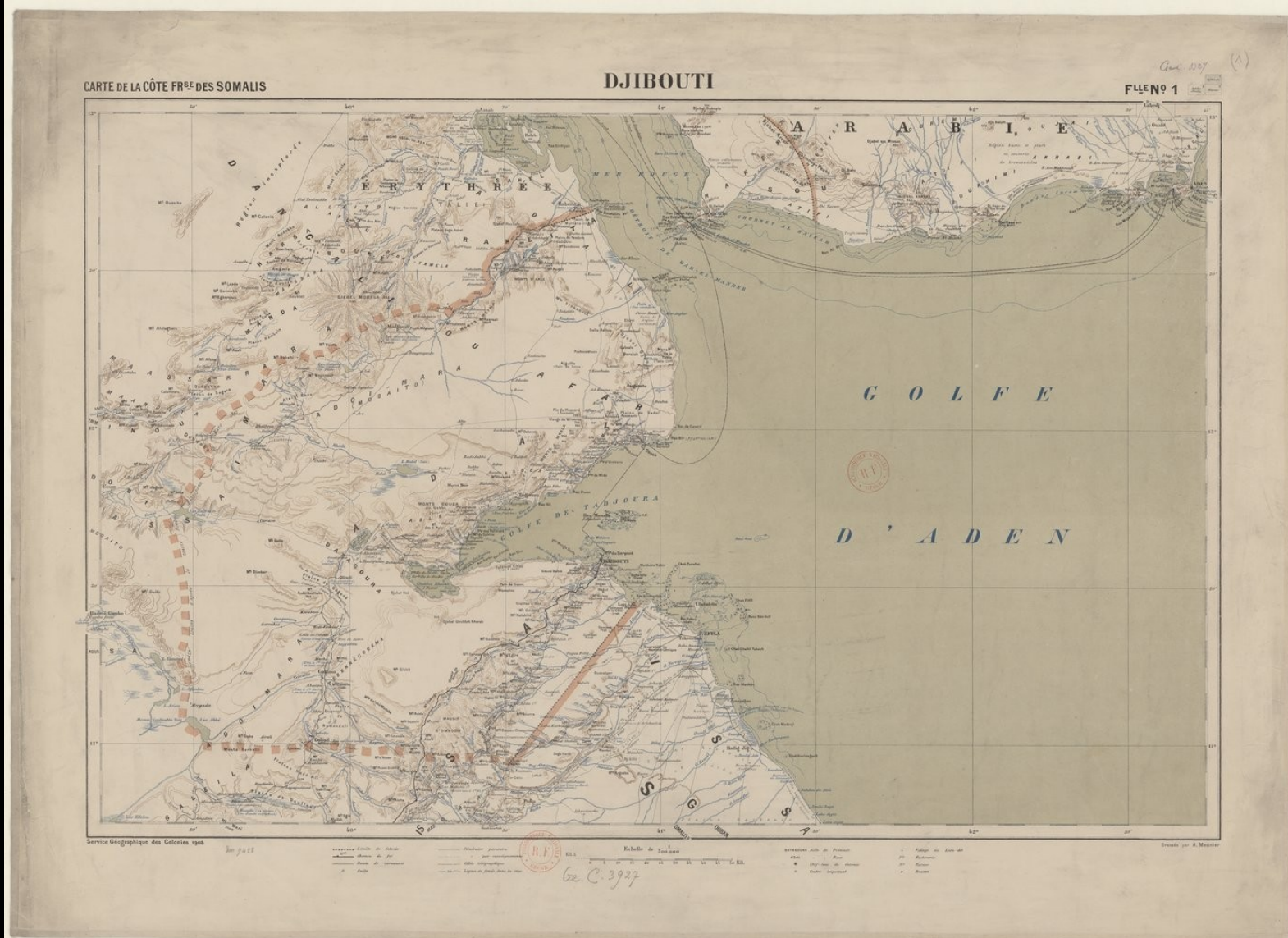
Djibouti



Djibouti



Djibouti
French Map
1870



Djibouti

The country is mostly plateau, plains and highlands including eight mountain ranges up to 2,000 metres, along the rift where the African Plate and the Somali Plate meet the Arabian Plate, creating the lowest elevation in Africa at Lake Assal. The vegetation is xeric grasslands, shrublands and coastal desert, with a hot desert climate and daily temperatures of 32 to 41°C and rainfall less than 130 mm.



Djibouti – Mountains near Dasbiyo

Djibouti
Lake Assal



Djibouti
Houses
Mabla
Mountains

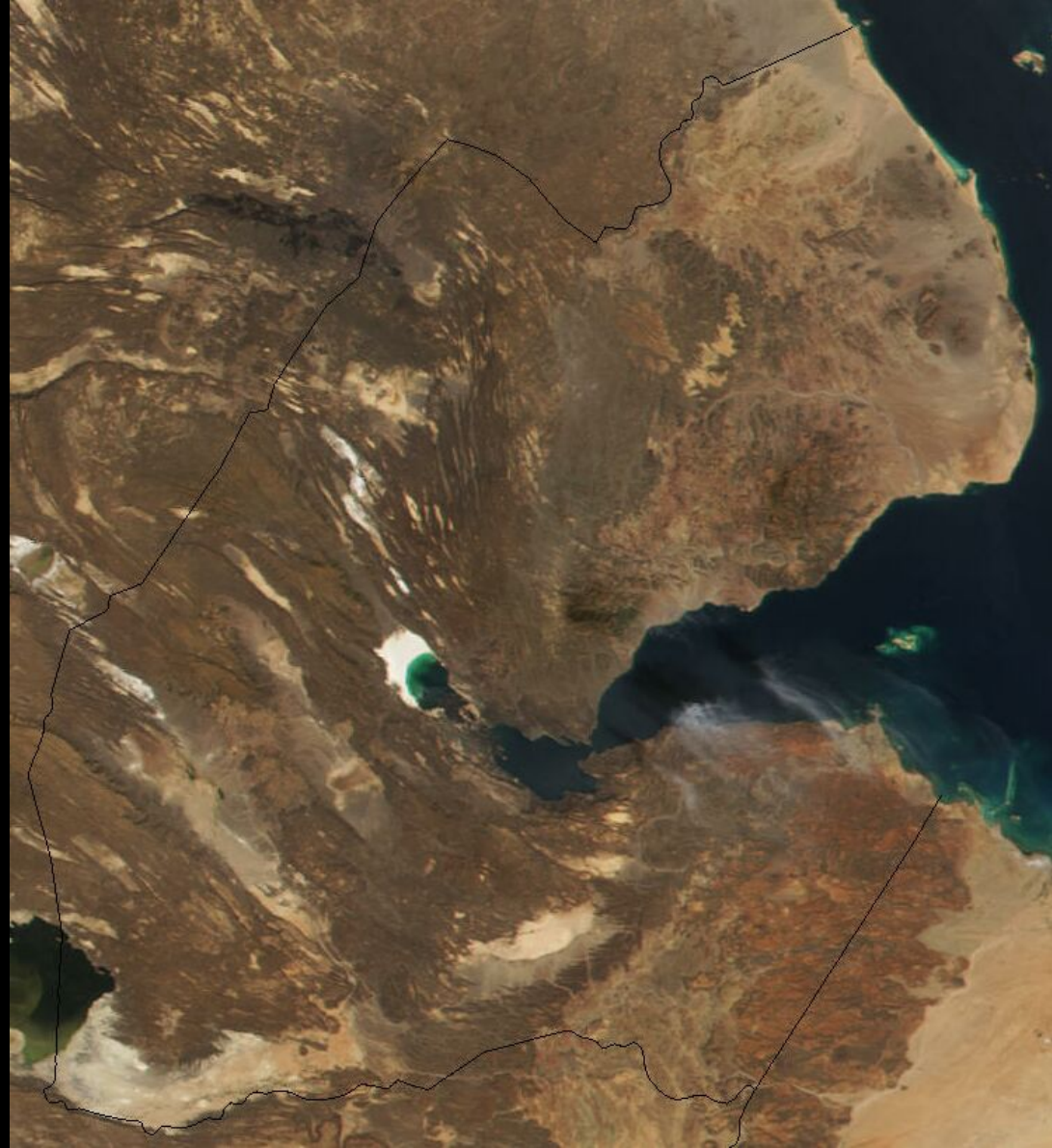




Djibouti Coast

Djibouti

Satellite
Image

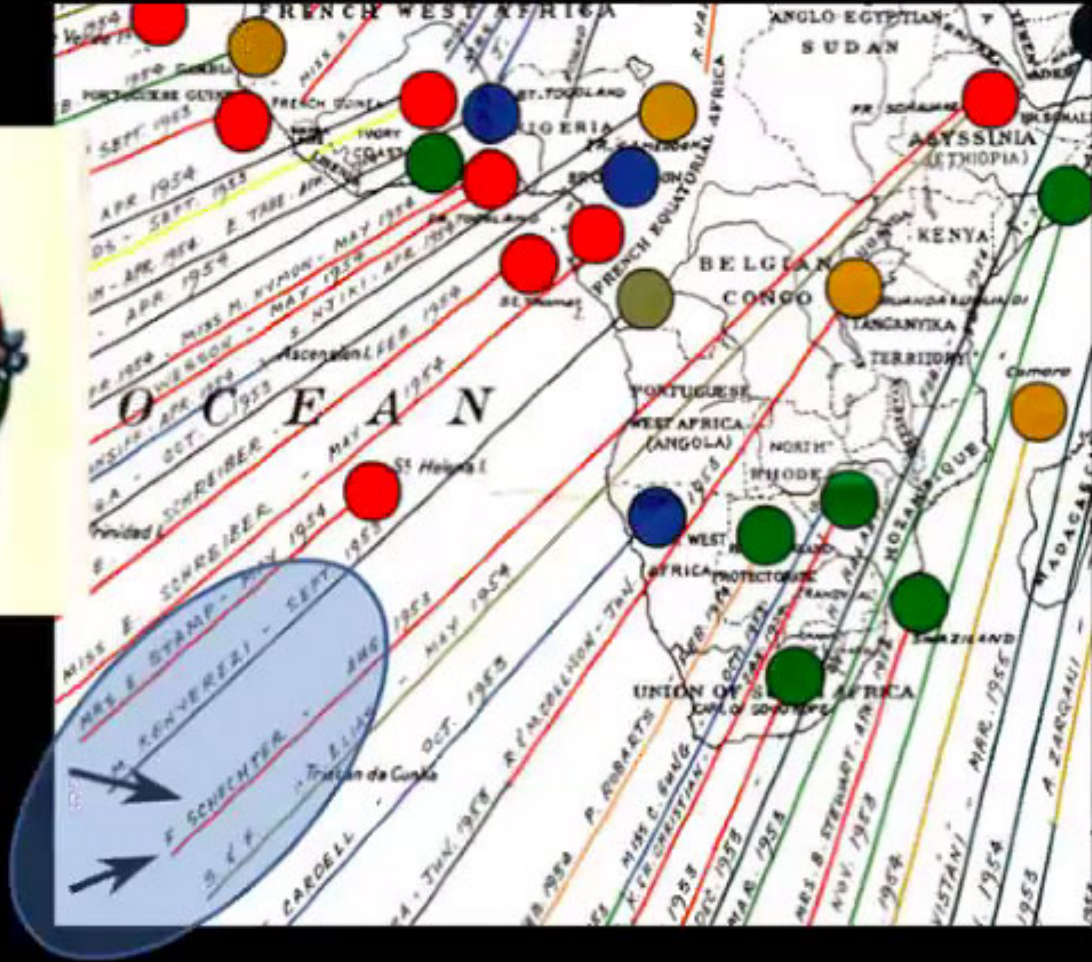




Djibouti

Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

Three Knights of Bahá'u'lláh worked to establish the Bahá'í Faith in what was then French Somaliland. Fred Schechter could only stay six months, so Sabri and Fatimah Raissa Elias followed the next year. We have a unique opportunity in telling their stories. Jim Schechter, Fred's son, has documented Fred's extensive correspondence with his parents, giving us a view in his own words of what it was like to pioneer in difficult circumstances. A book has been published on the story of the Elias family.



Knights of Bahá'u'lláh – French Somaliland

Fred Schechter

Fred Schechter (1927-2017) became a Bahá'í in 1949. He studied library science.



Young
Fred
Schechter



Fred Schechter



Fred Schechter
at
Bahá'í House
of Worship
Wilmette



Fred Schechter

When Shoghi Effendi wrote in 1951 about the Africa Two Year Plan, Fred offered to go to Africa.

Fred
Schechter
offer to go
to Africa

V. PERSONAL STATEMENTS:

14. Please write a brief statement giving your reasons for wishing to pioneer in Africa you may have, such knowledge of an Africanism, etc. If you have a limited period of

(See additional sheet)

6/27/51

Dear Friends:

My principal reason for wishing to pioneer in Africa is availability. I graduated from Syracuse University in June, 1951 as an American Studies major and should have an MA in library science by June, 1952.

Although my major didn't touch any of the essentials for African pioneering, I am fairly familiar with the methods for studying a culture and feel that by June, 1952 can be quite prepared to go.

There may be job opportunities in the goal countries for librarians with the U. S. Government.

I am available to settle for any length of time and am willing to do any type of work. With a little review of my navy training, I feel I might be able to qualify for a practical nurse certificate, but am not certain.

I can always be reached through the Syracuse Bahá'í Assembly, Box 976, Syracuse 1, N. Y., but for the summer (until Sept. 4) will be at Green Acre.

With prayers,

(Sgd) Fred Schechter

ret questionnaire

VI. DATE & SIGNATURE:

6/27/51

Date

(Sgd) Fred Schechter
Signature

Fred Schechter

When the work situation in Somaliland was hopeless, he was directed to Nairobi. He sailed on the *African Sun* on 10 March 1953 with Frederick and Elizabeth Laws (later Knights of Bahá'u'lláh for Lesotho), arriving in Nairobi on 1 May 1953.

Fred Schechter
with
Fred and Beth
Laws
on
S.S. African Sun
1953



With Fred and Beth Laws

Fred Schechter



Fred Schechter



Fred
Schechter
from
Dar es Salaam
on his way
to Nairobi
24 April 1953

Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika
Friday, April 24, 1953

Dear Mom and Dad,

Your two letters, sent to Durban and Mombasa, were here when we arrived Tuesday. It was a most pleasant surprisssssss since you didn't know we were coming to this port, but the Farrell agents in the various cities are in constant touch and so they just forwarded my letters with their own papers to the Sun. I also received a letter from the Johnsons and one from the British Africa committee.

No matter how hard my fond parents try, they cannot come close to concealing their anxieties for their wandering offspring, and of course there is really nothing that the offspring can do to relieve your fears. If this business is God's will, and I know it is, well just relax and enjoy it. I'm having the time of my life meeting all sorts of people, seeing strange, indescribable places, and participating in laying the foundation for one of the pillars of what will one day be the Universal House of Justice. What can possibly happen to ill? I feel that you are assured that the Guardian knows what he's doing. I think you might gain some ease if you could get copies of his message of last November entitled "The Spiritual Conquest of the Entire Planet", and also his message to the conference at Kampala of last month, and finally the message, we are all looking forward to, to be sent to the All-American conference and convention at Wilmette, next week. This whole thing is merely a step by step realization of the Master Plan outlined by 'Abdu'l-Baha. Everything the Guardian has asked thus far has been accomplished. Who can doubt the efficacy of his word now? I am as safe from harm here as I can be anywhere.

The news you've sent is a joy to receive. Now that I can't

merely a step by step realization of the Master Plan outlined by 'Abdu'l-Baha. Everything the Guardian has asked thus far has been accomplished. Who can doubt the efficacy of his word now? I am as safe from harm here as I can be anywhere.

become waterlogged and start to rot.

Although I'm missing the cherry blossoms and all the green of a New York Spring, I've got the winter of the tropics. Anacardium, not in bloom at the moment, frangi-pangi, palm trees and many others. Since I can just about tell the difference between a pansy and a rose, I haven't bothered to find out any names of the African flora, I just wander about enjoying their beauty.



This whole thing is



Aziz Yazdi
 Zablon
 Joseph
 Jacob
 'Aynu'd-Dín Ala'i
 Fred Laws
 Beth Laws
 Elaine
 Mathew
 Sue Yazdi
 Tahereh Ala'i
 Fred Schechter
 Vida Yazdi
 Claire Gung
 Jamilah Yazdi

Fred
 Schechter
 in Nairobi
 1953

Nairobi - 1953

Fred Schechter in Nairobi

commenting on the
Mau Mau uprising
in Kenya



Can't understand your anxiety...

The tribulations of the world, whether Mau Mau, or Korea or South Africa or anything else, if dwelled upon would drive men to suicide. Manifest peace and all about you will be at peace. The wars of the world are within each one of us. Create peace and love in your heart and soon all other wars will vanish. They will become like the squabbling of children....

Letter to
Fred
Schechter
from the
Pioneering
Committee
in USA

VIA AIR LETTER
1277 New Hampshire Ave, N W
Wash 6 D.C.
June 17, 1953

Fred Schechter,
Barclays Bank
Nairobi, Kenya

Dear Fred:

Our WSA just advised us that it wishes you to pioneer in one of the new territories assigned to the U.S. and with this news came a letter from the laws stating that you applied for visa for French Somaliland.

We are delighted at this news, but wish to caution you that any move from a pioneer post assigned should not be taken without the advice and consultation

Please share what news you get from us with the friends in Nairobi. There are so many letters to be written. Did you hear that 150 believers volunteered at the Inter-Continental Conference in Chicago to pioneer in all parts of the world? A great portion of them want to go to Africa, and the volume of work in connection with processing these friends is tremendous.

in Africa, and the volume of work in connection with processing these friends is tremendous.

Marguerite and William Sears and their son Michael are sailing on the 20th on the Africa Sun for Johannesburg. They will visit all Africa Centers, groups and isolated believers after they get settled. Behlyith and Harry Ford are ready to sail for Johannesburg June 30th. Mr. & Mrs. Bishop Brown of Pittsburgh are ready to go to South Africa. All these are to go at the Guardian's special request. Peggy and George True are getting ready to go to Nigeria. Elsie Austin is making application for jobs possibly in the Northern Protectorate country. She wouldn't know just where and when, but is trying to get to Africa. We are just so thrilled with the activities and the response of the friends.

Our prayers are always with you, Fred, and you being "mobile" (as the British Committee describe you) wouldn't have to go thru the process of being "uprooted", so to speak, but just pack and go. It's a wonderful Cause. The Movements and Processes are so mysterious and so practical.

With much love, we are
Ever Faithful,

(Mrs.) Bessie Barham, Sec'y

Fred
Schechter
in Nairobi
1953



Nairobi – Public Meeting May 3, 1953

Message from the Guardian to disperse

URGE FULL FLEDGED BAHÁ'Í ASSEMBLIES BRITISH TERRITORIES UGANDA
TANGANYIKA KENYA NOW REGARDED MOST POWERFUL PILLARS
SWIFTLY EMERGING STEADILY CONSOLIDATING HIGHLY PROMISING
AFRICAN BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY **SET GLORIOUS EXAMPLE** THROUGH
PROMPT MEASURES INITIATION EXTENSION WORK **THROUGH DESPATCH**
SURPLUS MEMBERS LOCAL COMMUNITIES INCLUDING AFRICANS
NEIGHBOURING TERRITORIES

FRENCH SOMALILAND RUANDA URUNDI MADAGASCAR FRENCH
BELGIAN CONGO COMORO ISLANDS EVEN ALGERIA MOROCCO

ACCELERATING THERBY PROCESS FORMATION LOCAL ASSEMBLIES
ESTABLISHMENT NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CENTRAL EAST AFRICA ADDING
FRESH LAURELS CROWN ALREADY WON PIONEERING FIELD AFRICAN
CONTINENT.

SHOGHI, 13 May 1953

application two books of Baha'i administration, and the laws and regulations of the Baha'i Spiritual Assemblies.

This bit of news, although, I suppose is not full recognition of the Baha'i Faith as such, it nevertheless is extremely welcome in these very very troubled day, when everyone is suspected and all organizations frowned upon.

Lately, the situation in Nairobi has become worse and the army had to come in and give a helping hand to the police. The latest form of protest decided upon by the africans and unanimously carried are the boycotting of buses, the stopping of smoking and the stopping of drinking beer and light refreshments. You cannot find one single african contravening these decisions and you will be surprised of the effect. The bus company had to suspend several lines, the East African Brewery has suffered so much that its shares fell from 52 shillings to 25/-. Its is feared that pretty soon there may be a general strike of all africans!!!!

Another very lovely news is a beautiful letter from our beloved Guardian, addressed to the Secretary of the LIA of Nairobi. This letter is full of love and benediction from the Guardian

As for the other pioneers, of course our first and the leader of the group, Mr. Fred Schechter is now in French Somaliland, Mr. and Mr Laws have left by car last saturday for BASUTOLAND. I have just recieved a letter form them from Mbeya just before they crossed the frontier from Tanganyka to Northern Rhodesia. Miss Claire Gung left Mombasa by sea for Beira and from there by Rail to Southern Rhodesia. Last I heard from her was yesterday, she was in Dar-es-Salaam and met the friends there. Ted Cardell is now on the Atlantic Ocean, heading for Cape-town and from there by Rail to Windhoek, the Capital of South-West Africa.

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As for the internal attention work, when the declaration signed by Mooty Averi, brother of the Nyanza African member of the Legislative Council, is confirmed by the Africa Committee, we shall have four centers besides Nairobi, in other words 5 centers in Kenya. Next week, two of the Nairobi Baha'is, technical assistants at the railways administration, will after passing the examination at the administration's technical college be transferred to outside Nairobi at one of the railway stations, thus adding two new centers to the present number.

and from there to Dekkar, Rio de Oro, Spanish Sahara and Asmara.

Every one here sends you his love. Tired Cannot write Love, Hoo

Other
Knights of
Bahá'u'lláh
spread out
from Nairobi

Fred Schechter

With the goals of the Ten Year Crusade announced, Fred was asked to pioneer to French Somaliland. He received a three-month visa on 12 June, sailed on 24 June, stopped in Mogadishu to meet Suhayl Samandari, and arrived in Djibouti on 2 August 1953.

Fred Schechter going to Djibouti



enough Baha'is
this way at
Somali
As

7 July 1953

Dear Mom and Pop,

Happy few days after the 4th of July. Since there are so few of us patriotic Americans in this part of the world, we all got invited to the Consul General's home to celebrate the 4th. There were no fireworks, only tea, coffee and punch; but it was nice to meet some people from the States. Most of them are in the government in one way or another and another few are connected with British branches of American business. It was good even to hear a good Texas drawl instead of a silly English accent. In many ways this is typical of any American community overseas. They just have one round of parties after another and look half dead. The poor dears are not only getting good salaries, but also an additional overseas pay, and with nothing to do, they just take turns throwing brawls. It was pleasant to meet them all anyway.

With the cooperation of the Baha'i Publishing Committee and Baha'i News, I think I will soon be able to arrange for their sending us materials by air freight, which is much cheaper than air mail. They will be able to send everything to a central point and then have it distributed locally. This will eliminate delay in getting things here and will also save money. Thanks for all the inquiries you've made.

I've sent for an application to the Institute of Int. St. I said my field would be Library Use in Adult Education, and hoped to work in South Africa. Actually I doubt whether I'll get anything, but it's worth a try.

a few months before wandering off again. I've gotten everybody's approval to go to Djibuti, French Somaliland, including the Governor General of the place, so now I'm trying to arrange transportation there. It's not very far from here and will put me just on the other end of the Red Sea from Haifa. Also it's the port for Ethiopia with many American interests so I don't think it will be difficult to find work. The French have given me a visa for "business and pleasure".

The group here seems a bit more mixed than the one in Syracuse, but each one here has a much greater understanding of the Faith, making of lovely blend of East and West. I'm not on the Assembly. We were still at sea on April 21 and there were

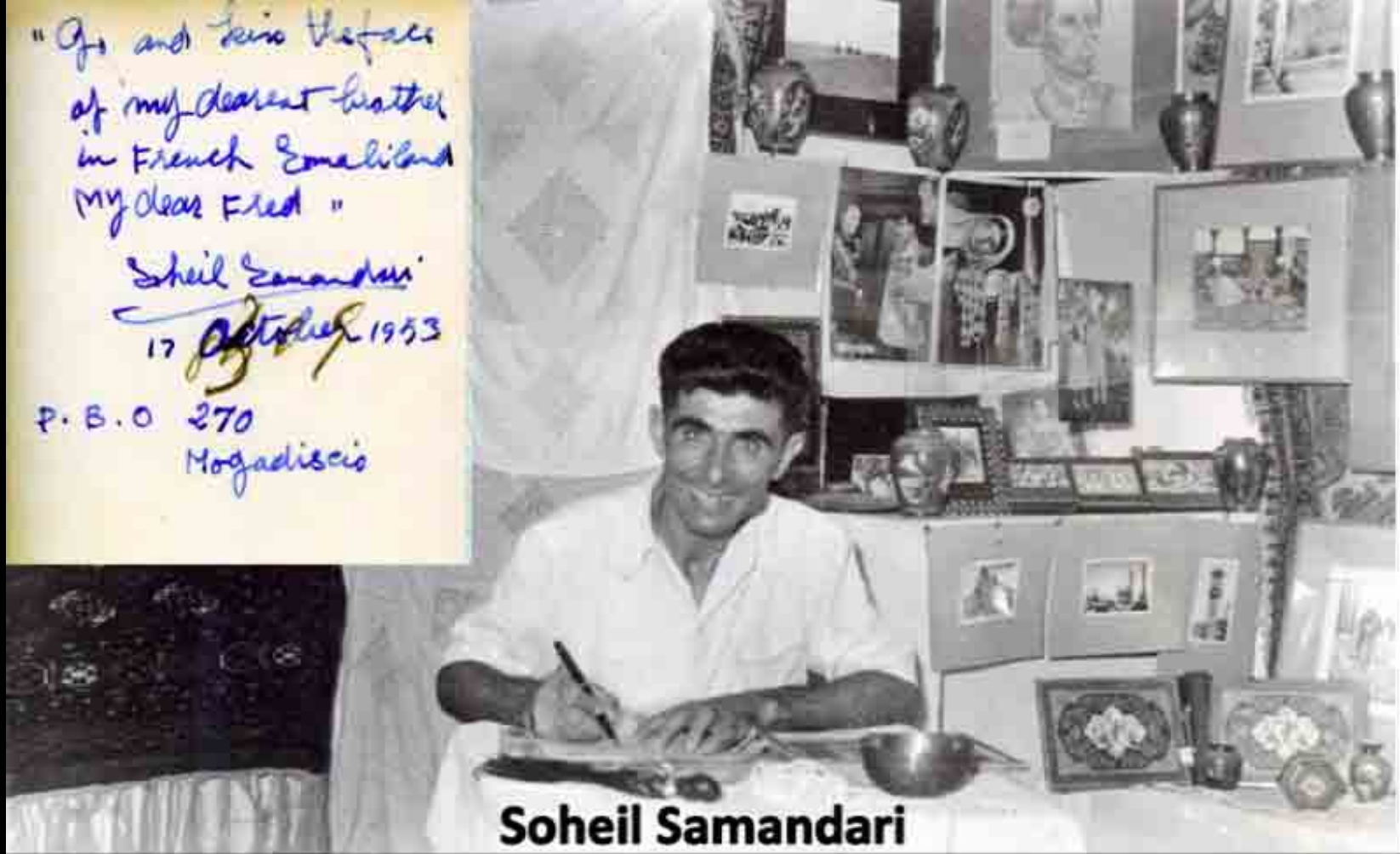
Fred Schechter



"Of and to the faces
of my dearest brother
in French Somaliland
My dear Fred "

Soheil Samandari
17 October 1953

P. B. O 270
Mogadiscio



Soheil Samandari

**Mogadishu, Italian Somaliland
(Knight of Bahau'llah)**

**Soheil
Samandari**

**Knight of
Bahá'u'lláh
for
Italian
Somaliland**

Tripolitania
the ship
Fred Schechter
took to
Djibouti



Tripolitania

scatcher

TELEGRAM

AUGUST 8, 1953

Full rate
Horace Holley, 536 Sheridan Road, Wilmette, Illinois

FRED SCHECHTER SETTLING FIRST AMERICAN VIRGIN AREA ARRIVED
FRENCH SOMALILAND AUGUST SECOND REQUESTS PRAYERS

AFRICA COMMITTEE, BARHAM

PH 5:15 PM

Fred
Schechter
arrives in
Djibouti

Fred
Schechter
tells
parents
of his
arrival in
Djibouti

CLASS OF SERVICE
This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its de-fined character is indicated by a suitable symbol shown on pre-calling the address.

WESTERN UNION

1291

SYMBOLS
DL=Day Letter
NI=Night Letter
LT=Day Letter Telegram
VT=Day Telegram

W. P. MARSHALL, President

(56) 95

The filing time shown at the start of a telegram and day letter is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination.

SYA056

SY⁴CDU358 22 PD INTL FR=ID DJIBOUTI VIA MACKAY 4 1621=

: JOSEPH SCHECHTER =

: 23 SCHENCK AVE GREAT NECK NY =

ARRIVED SAFELY VERY HOT ADDRESS CARE HOTEL CONTINENTAL

DJIBOUTI FRENCH SOMALILAND LETTER FOLLOWING =

: FRED =

Fred Schechter

He wrote:

"It is Hot! It wasn't bad enough to find such heat, but the French authorities toyed with me all day, decided whether or not they should let me off the ship. This was from 9 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon when the ship sailed. After deciding I wasn't dangerous and getting a \$300 bond, they let me ashore. I had supper and went to sleep. I haven't stopped perspiring since I arrived."

(Quoted in Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 53)

Hotel Continental



Photograph by Holmes from Galloway

FRENCH SOMALILAND'S CAPITAL IS POETICALLY TERMED "THE QUEEN OF THE SANDS"

From offshore Djibouti's whitewashed stone and mud buildings, piles of salt, blue sea water, and snowy beach sands sparkling in the sunlight make an attractive picture, but on shore the heat, flies, and fleas vie at times in creating human discomfort. The square before Hotel Continental, a modern hostelry, built to resist the intense heat.

Djibouti – Hotel Continental where Fred Schechter stayed

Fred
Schechter
first
impressions
of
Djibouti

17 lb

255

c/o Hotel Continental
Djibouti
French Somaliland
4 August 1953

cc. French.
NSA
7 Members
You all

and Fred
at the bank
I want money

U.S. Africa Committee
Mrs. Bessie Barham, Sec'y
1277 New Hampshire Ave., N.W.
Washington 6, D.C.

Beloved Friends:

Loving greetings from Djibouti! By the Grace of God, I arrived here Sunday, and am in need of all your prayers. So far all is quite well.

I'll try to give you an account of what has happened since leaving Mombasa. The ship didn't sail until the morning of the 24th. It was scheduled for the 22nd. This gave me two days to meet with some of our contacts in Mombasa, and to report the progress there to the friends in Nairobi. The way it looks to me at the moment, it seems as if there should be an Assembly there next April; one more step towards the Central, East Africa U.S.A.

On the 26th (Sunday) the ship arrived at Mogadiscio, Somalia where I met Schell Sumantari who is pioneering there. We spent a most wonderful day together. He's been there several months and is having difficulties. Almost everyone there is Muslim. He has a tremendous advantage though, by knowing Arabic. The ship also stopped at Aden, but I met none.

On the second of August (Sunday) I arrived in Djibouti. Is it Hot! It wasn't bad enough to find such heat, but the French authorities toyed with us all day, deciding whether or not they should let us off the ship. This was from 9 in the evening until 5 in the afternoon when the ship sailed. After deciding I wasn't dangerous and getting a

so tremendous happiness within
a friends meeting together
without joy. Djibouti is at
L.A. is at the other end. Yes

Djibouti is a pleasant enough city, but the heat is terrible. Yesterday I wandered through the streets just looking around and saying Ya Bahá'u'l-Abhá. I'm the only American in all French Somaliland, and there are only a couple of Englishmen. Very few people understand English and my French is a little crude, but so far I've been able to get along. There will probably be some difficulty in finding work. However, if God has gotten me this far, all will work out for the best.

Fred Schechter
in Djibouti
1953



Fred
Schechter
from
Djibouti
3 August 1953

% Hotel Continental

Djibouti
French Somaliland
3 August 1953

Dear Mom and Dad,

Loving greetings from Djibouti. I arrived here yesterday, Sunday, and got in late in the evening. Everything was closed then so had to wait until today before doing anything. All is well except the heat. Why anyone would want to come here is beyond me. It's a pleasant enough little city, but they tell me it's cool now and I should wait until it gets warm. The average mean temperature is 42 degrees centigrade; I don't dare find out what that is on a Farenheit thermometer.

I'm staying in a little chateau known as the Grand Hotel Continental, but don't believe it. It's got all the necessary conveniences, but not much more. My room is about half the size of the living room in the apartment but much higher. There's a nice fan blowing down from the center of the ceiling

All is well except the heat. Why anyone would want to come here is beyond me. It's a pleasant enough little city, but they tell me it's cool now and I should wait until it gets warm. The average mean temperature is 42 degrees centigrade; I don't dare find out what that is on a Farenheit thermometer.

to see the place. There were also some of them travelling on their way to Mecca. They travel third class or deck which means they stay out on the deck or sleep in bunks in the lower part of the ship. Since the heat was bad enough out in the air, not many of them went below to suffocate. They got off at Aden and will go from their to Jeddah on the Red Sea coast and then probably walk to Mecca. The first stop the ship made was at Noradiscio, Italian Somaliland. There is a young Persian Baha'i there trying to get established. He's been there four months. He came to the ship and we were able to spend the day together. Except for the handful of Italians, there are Somalis and Arabs, all Muslim. They all think Scheil Samindari (that's his name) is an Arab because he speaks Arabic even though he tries to tell them he's Persian. Just three days before I arrived he told a man about the Faith, this was his first mention of it to anyone. Up to this time he's been teaching the Qur'an to the Muslims. This man is around 60, a Sydd, which means a descendant of the Prophet, and a devout Muhammedan. When Scheil, who's been nursing him along, finally told him about Baha'u'llah, the man broke down, and he's been drinking it up ever since. I had a most pleasant

several other
in a city, but
remains of
country is now
is governing.
dependent. God
there's nothing
but I've never
over the world;
I've decided
of staying
of money in
le here, but only
world and a
Allah. And even
if Shoghi Effendi
knows that
valuable comfort.

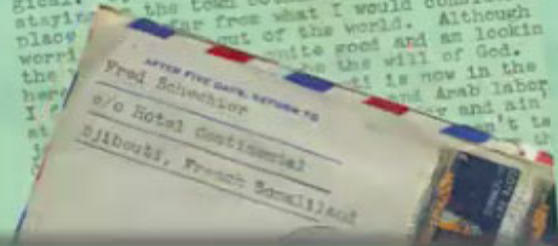


Fred Schechter
in Djibouti



Fred Schechter settling in in Djibouti

I think a good part of my early difficult
gical. Djibouti is not much to look at, and
staying in the town bothered me. Also I think
place was so far from what I would consider a
worried me to be out of the world. Although
the world, I do feel quite good and am looking
here for a while, if it be the will of God.
Part of the reason that
I don't feel any more in
the world, I do feel quite good and am looking
forward to working
here for a while, if it be the will of God.



c/o Hotel Continental
Djibouti
French Somaliland
19 August 1953

Dear Mom and Dad,

Yesterday your second letter arrived along with one from Edith.
It sure was good to get them. All is still well, or should I say,
the situation seems to be improving. Whatever it is, this is proving
the adaptability of man. By now you're on your vacation, and I hope
and pray that you're doing something that you'll not only enjoy, but
something that will relax you. The thought that you are praying for
my guidance is very comforting. Please be assured that I too pray
for you. I constantly ask God that we may all be content with His will,
and be guided to do what will be best for us. I don't think that any-
thing that happens to us is harmful; everything guides us closer to
God.

Edith has come and gone by now. I do hope they'll be able to
get to South Africa, not only for the sake of the Edith's Edith, but
for themselves. It's really a most beautiful country. The few
flowers and landscape.

I think a good part of my early difficulties here were psychological. Djibouti is not much to look at, and perhaps the thought of staying in the town bothered me. Also I think that I thought this place was so far from what I would consider civilization, that it worried me to be out of the world. Although I don't feel any more in the world, I do feel quite good and am looking forward to working here for a while, if it be the will of God. Part of the reason that

*Much love
F*

too low on funds. I had a check of \$500 which I
I landed which will be refunded to me when I leave. And I still have another
putting money in the bank, only no interest. And I still have another
\$300 which should last for some time. The cost of living here is
rather high, and I think that next week I'm going to look for another
room that's less expensive. This one comes to something like \$4. per
day for room and board. I think I can find a room that'll be fairly
cheap and then try to prepare my own meals. Never fear, though, I'm
not moving into a tent or under a donkey cart. And my mail can still
be sent here.

Souvenirs de Djibouti. - Rue Gambetta



Djibouti
as it
was

Editeur: "Au Four Marché", Djibouti

Fred Schechter

"The French... think that I'm a newspaper man or a writer of some sort, and are not too happy with the prospects of my staying around. Almost the entire population of French Somaliland lives in Djibouti. There are a few thousand nomadic shepherds tending their flocks in the hills around the Ethiopian border. Most of the country is lava rock with not a thing growing on it. Since nothing grows here, everything is imported. The only local industries are the port and a salt mill. Djibouti is the other extreme from a tourist resort, and I've been blessed with a security officer following me around."

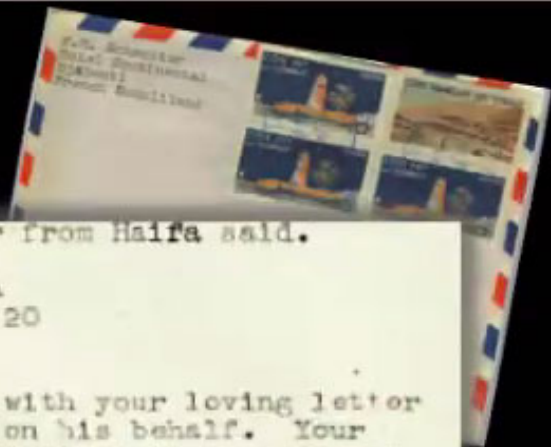
(Quoted in Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 53-54)

Fred
Schechter
receives
a letter
from Haifa
20 August
1953

UNION COMMERCIAL
SILVER
7 September 1953

Dear Mr and Mrs,

Will be glad to help you in any way I can. I would be glad to let you know how you or the other about a job. But after seeing the manager of the...



You're probably interested in what the letter from Haifa said. Without comment, I'll just quote it.

Haifa
Aug. 20

Dear Baha'i Brother:

The beloved Guardian was very deeply touched with your loving letter of August 3rd. He has asked me to acknowledge it on his behalf. Your letter is historic, because it is the first communication to come from a Baha'i in French Somaliland.

The Guardian deeply values and appreciates your devoted services to the Faith, and particularly your pioneering service in one of the virgin areas of the Global Crusade. Your name will ever be associated with those immortals who have left family, friends and home for the difficult task of introducing the Faith into new areas. Certainly the confirmations of the Holy Spirit will be with you at all times.

The beloved Guardian wishes me to assure you that he will pray fervently for your guidance and confirmation; that heavenly blessings may reach you at all times; and that the seeds you sow will reap a rich and abundant harvest.

Baha'i world, giving the good news of the progress of the work and of his expectations of elevation during the Holy Year.

Leroy Innes (Leroy)

Assistant Secretary



World spiritual crusade, mightiest agency yet conceived for the systematic execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, has been befittingly ushered in through successive, magnificent victories won by Bahá'u'lláh's crusaders in virgin territories in every continent of the globe.

Cablegram September 20, 1953

Shoghi Effendi, "Messages to the Bahá'í World "

Fred Schechter

Fred tried to find work, and began giving English lessons. The Guardian had said not to teach the Faith openly, and Fred's French was limited. In September he met a Somali man who spoke English, and they talked about the Faith.

200-474

Hotel Continental
Djibouti

At certain of the street corners are water pipes where the Somali women and Arabs gather with their water cans to get the daily supply of fresh water. On the streets rickety carts and new American cars battle for the right of way.

Essentially, Djibouti is in the hard currency area, so there's no dollar shortage. The franc Djibouti is worth twice as much as the French franc, and the cost of living is about as high as the pocket-book can stand. Most of the white population is French, and most of these are in the government. The others are in the shipping concerns or in the bank. I understand that the French government permits them to stay only two years, and then they must go somewhere else. The non-French white population seems here to make a quick fortune, and then leave. So that with the governing officials apparently spending

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My one real contact is a Somali man originally from British Somaliland. He speaks good English, thank God, and we've been getting along fine. He's the second or third best paid Somali in Djibouti, getting 35,000 francs, or approximately \$165.00 per month. He's got a wife and they're expecting a child soon. The best the average man can hope he'll ever get is 20,000 francs and this is rare. This is truly the work of God that led me to him. I was looking for a job in the office where he works, and we just got to talking. We meet each evening after his office closes and just talk for a few hours. He's a good Roman Catholic, and nearly floored me when he told me he represented French Somaliland during the Holy Year, 1950, at the Vatican. He had a private audience with the Pope; was there for five days. If it is the will of God, he will open his eyes and heart. Anyway he's told many of his friends about the Faith, so that through him seeds are being sown.

Have plenty of reading material, books, and almost every Sahal's book available. Some French Sahal's books are on their way and should be here soon. The only Englishman in the city is the British vice-consul. We've become friendly and he supplies us with the London Times and back issues of the New Yorker. There just isn't anything like a hearing here. I know it's hard to believe, but honestly Djibouti is nothing.

Thanks for all your thoughts and prayers. They've cleared away what I thought were difficulties. The news of the U.S.A. members going pioneering is truly inspirational. I know that this must bring great joy to our beloved Guardian. You are always in my prayers.

*much love
Fred*

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Fred
Schechter

Fred Schechter
in Djibouti





à la plage -

Djibouti

Sept. 1953.

moi, Rafang, Le Blanc,
et Bui

Fred Schechter

By late October, with no job, renewing his visa was a big problem. "Unofficially, I've been told to stop talking with the non-French population if I hope to renew my visa." The head of security said the French motto 'Liberté, égalité, fraternité' in Paris did not apply in Djibouti. On 5 November, his visa extension was refused, and two days later he left on the train for Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, with a 15 day visa. He tried to get a job as a librarian.

Fred
Schechter's
refusal of
visa extension

AR/JD

Côte Française
des
Somalis et dépendances

République Française
Liberté - Egalité - Fraternité

Services AFFAIRES ADMINISTRATIVES.- Djibouti, le 30 OCT. 1953 195

N^o 3398 /AA.-

Analyse :
Votre demande de prolongation
d'autorisation de résidence.

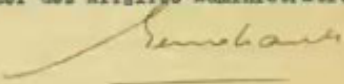
Le Gouverneur
de la Côte Française des Somalis
à Monsieur SCHECHTER Frédéric
Hôtel Continental
- D J I B O U T I -

Monsieur,

En réponse à votre lettre du 13 Octobre 1953, j'ai l'honneur de vous faire connaître qu'il ne m'est pas possible de vous autoriser à prolonger votre séjour en Côte Française des Somalis.

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur, l'assurance de ma considération distinguée.

Par Ordre :

Le Chef des Affaires Administratives:


F. GENDRAULT.

In response to your letter of 13 October, 1953, let it be known that it is not possible for me to authorize you to extend your stay on the French side of Somalis.

By Order:
The Head of
Administrative
Affairs

Djibouti
7 November 1953

Dear mom and pop,

It's Saturday morning and I'm all set to leave for Addis Ababa on the train this evening. It's supposed to leave at 7:45 P.M., which is just about noon in New York. No doubt you received my cable and in all probability I'll send another from Addis, but I thought I'd write as long as there is the time. I'm sure that this letter will leave here Monday and you'll get it next Thursday or Friday. I don't know when the mail leaves Addis although I imagine it'll be much more often than from here.

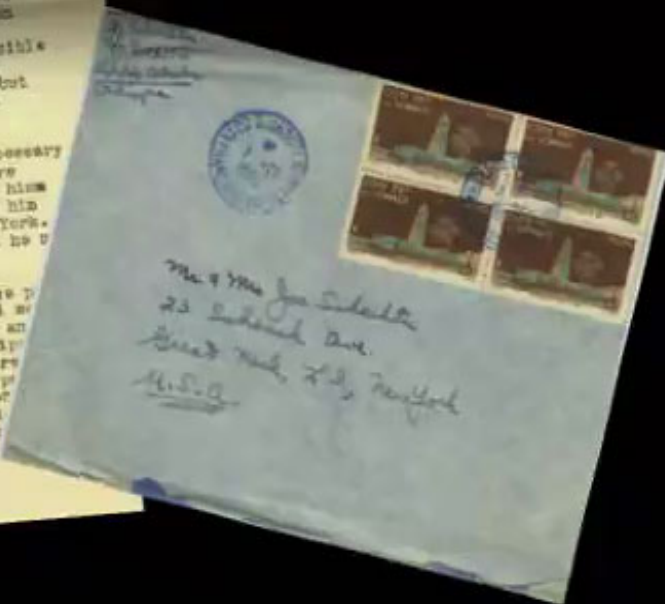
All is quite well. To put it mildly, I'm rather disappointed in having to leave Djibouti. Of course I'll be more comfortable and life will be more enjoyable away from here, but it merely means that the goal of getting a Baha'i into this place has not been accomplished. The return address on the envelope is the address

that the goal of getting a Baha'i into this place has not been accomplished. The return address on the envelope is the address of the Addis Ababa Baha'i Assembly. I think it best that you don't use it until I definitely know that it's correct. If you don't get any new address from me in a cable or in a letter from Addis that may reach you before this letter, then write to me c/o American Consulate, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. As soon as possible I'll write and let you know how everything is. At present, I'm fine. Had debated with myself whether or not to go swimming, but decided to do nothing on the last day here and rest up for the train ride. This train is hardly the 20th Century.

During the last couple of days, I've been saying these necessary goodbyes, and was rather surprised at the number of people I've gotten to know. There's even the Somali. I think I mentioned him before, that hopes to go to the States to study music. I gave him our phone number just in case he ever really does get to New York. If everything works out for him, he may leave in January, but he'll go the other way by ship to San Francisco.

I hope that all has been calm and well with you for these few weeks, and that you've got all sorts of good news to tell me. Since there will be English speaking papers, or I should say any kind of papers, it won't be necessary for you to send any clip. I don't know if they'll carry the sports news, but since there be many Americans there, no doubt someone will be getting a paper. It's a rather lousy break to be riding back with the Vice-Gov. He'll be able to tell me what's what and what I'll have to do to get settled and in this job, if I take it. Will go out to see this now. All is well, so please don't worry. I pray that fine and happy.

Love, Fred



Fred
Schechter's
disappointment

Djibouti
7 November 1953

Fred
Schechter

Addis Ababa
March 1954

P.O. Box 502
Addis Ababa
Ethiopia
16 March 1954

Dear Dad and Mom,

Have your let eyes of the 5th and 10th March. Am happy that you're well. Will file the State Income tax return, but don't

I'm sorry you're puzzled and disconcerted but glad for the occasional satisfaction. Although I've got a visa to stay here six months, I have not been able to find a job, and have covered

six months, I have not been able to find a job, and have covered almost every available place. I intend to have been doing the same so that we've probably been in at least 30 different places without much success. The illustration was looking for a job too far without luck. I guess he's either afraid to ask the Superior or doesn't want to, but there is now job at the library at the moment. I have been offered a job with the Univ. of Addis Ababa library and have filled an application for residence

He arrived a couple of weeks ago. He went to school with three years a teaching job by the end of Ethiopia. I've been waiting to

Sorry I sound unreal. It isn't a question of settling in Africa which will determine a return to the States, but even if I got a job beginning tomorrow, could I just quit in six months or a year and return to the States? I came here to teach the Bahai Faith, not to get an education or travel or see the world. If these things happen while in the process, fine, but in order to accomplish the purpose for which I came, I must be in a location for some time. No one of us was aware that the Guardian would decide to make this a world embracing thing last year, but since he did, you've got to understand that I can't just wander around doing nothing about it. I can't see that being in Africa will harm my future or that being in the States will enhance it. I have no plans that you do not know about. This probably sounds just as unreal and disconcerting as before, but if the current world scene is real, I'm glad I'm living in a fairy tale.

Have heard from the Doves, Sylvia and George, and from Mr. Glass. Bill Sears dropped in on Maria a couple of weeks ago. He's been touring the centers around Italy and other parts of Europe before visiting Haifa. Marguerite will return to the States and get Bill, Jr. and return to Jersey. The Wolfe family should be permanently settled around the middle of April.

Mr. and Mrs. J. Schechter
25 Schenck Ave.
Great Neck, New York
U.S.A.

BY AIRMAIL
PAR AVION

Fred Schechter

It was suggested he might pioneer to Fezzan oasis in Libya. He replied:

"Am ready to leave for Fezzan on the next camel. I can imagine what it's like if God didn't permit 'Abdu'l-Bahá to go there. But if someone's gotta go, I can claim to have been vaccinated against anything in Djibouti - and anyway it's cold in Addis. I'd like to know whether there is something I could do there besides bathe camels."

(Quoted in Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 55)

Fred Schechter

He was then asked to stay in Addis Ababa. He managed to get a 6-month visa, but nobody would hire him.

Through Baha'is in South Africa, he was offered a job as librarian in Cape Town, arriving in August 1954.

He went on pilgrimage to meet Shoghi Effendi, and home to visit his family over Christmas 1955-56.

Capetown, South Africa
1955

Fred
Schechter
in
Cape Town
1955



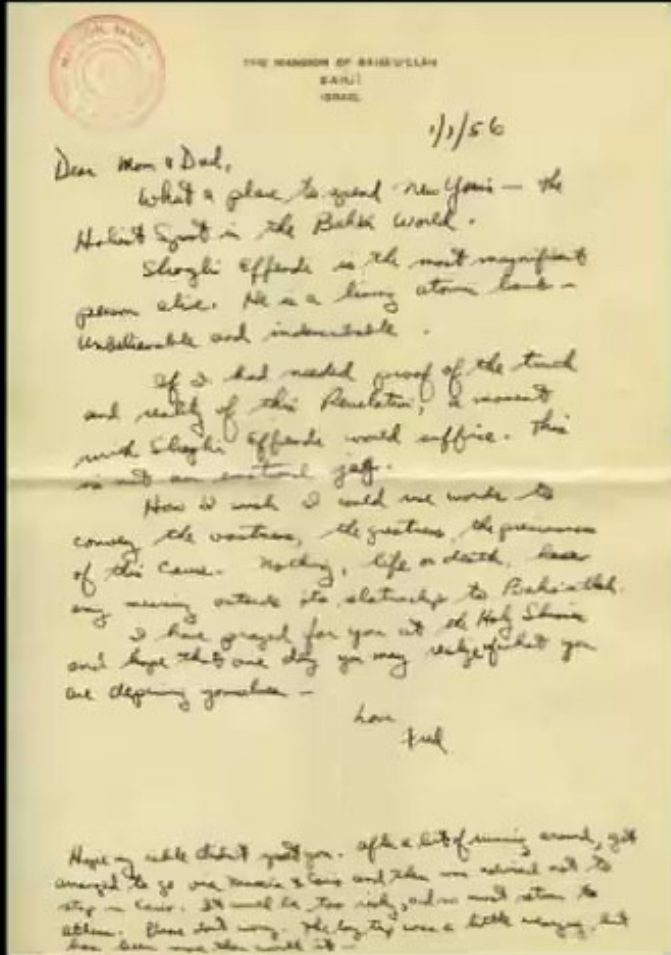
Fred Schechter in Cape Town

April 1955



U.S.A. Cape Town - April, 1955
Walter Kleist, Edith MacArthur, Elfride Kleist, Eleanor Hadden,
Fred Schechter
Grant Hadden, Edith Johnson, Lyall Hadden, Lowell Johnson

Fred
Schechter
about his
pilgrimage
1955-56



What a place to spend New Year's –
the Holiest Spot in the Baha'i World.
Shoghi Effendi is the most
magnificent person alive.

He is a living atomic bomb -
unbelievable and indescribable.
If I had needed proof of the truth
and reality of the Revelation, a
moment with Shoghi Effendi would
suffice. This is not an emotional jag.

How I wish I could use words to
convey the vastness, the greatness,
the preciousness of this Cause.

Nothing, life or death, has any
meaning outside its relationship to
Bahá'u'lláh.

I have prayed for you at the Holy
Shrine and hope that one day you
may realize of what you are
depriving yourselves.

Must return through Athens, Cairo too risky.

Fred Schechter

After two years in Cape Town, he was asked by Bill Sears, then Auxiliary Board Member, to go to the Sears farm in Johannesburg to help with the teaching work and preparations for the election of the Regional Assembly for South and West Africa.

Johannesburg – Temple Site



Fred
Schechter
in
Johannesburg



Fred Schechter - Bob Quigley - Lowell Johnson



Bob Quigley - Bill Sears

Sears Farm - Johannesburg

lettuce

carrots

cabbage

green beans

750 peach trees

tangerines

grapefruits.

boysenberries

strawberries

gooseberries

gooseberries

apple

Apricot

Pear

Plum

nectarine

fig

orange

lemon

Sears
Farm
near
Johannesburg

and 4500 crowns of asparagus
that just continued to grow and
grow.



Fred Schechter in Latin America

By 1958, Africa's goals had been achieved, but not South America, so Fred was off to Uruguay with Bill Sears Jr. arriving in 1959. In 1960 Fred married Julia Bulling, a pioneer from Chile. They went to the Dominican Republic, then Ecuador where their first son was born, then Uruguay, serving on the National Spiritual Assembly when a second son was born.

Fred
Schechter.
Billy Sears
Jr. and
wife



Uruguay - 1959

Fred
Schechter

Hand of the
Cause
Bill Sears,
wife and son



Fred, Bill, Marguerite and Billy Jr
Uruguay 1960

Fred
Schechter
and bride
Julia Bulling,
Bill Sears Jr.
and wife
1960



Fred and
Julia
Schechter

Hand of the
Cause
Enoch
Olinga

1961

Dominican Republic
with Hand of the
Cause Enoch Olinga
1961



Two couples
Fred
Schechter
and
Billy Sears Jr

Quito
Ecuador
1961



Fred
Schechter



First National Convention
Ecuador 1961
with Hand of the Cause Hasan Balyuzi

Fred
Schechter
and family
Billy Sears Jr.
and family,
Hand of the
Cause
William Sears



Quito, Ecuador - 1962

Fred Schechter

In 1965 economic conditions caused them to move to the United States. Fred served on the Auxiliary Board and the Continental Board of Counsellors. From 1993 to 1998 Fred was a Counsellor at the international Teaching Centre at the Bahá'í World Centre.

International Teaching Centre

International
Teaching
Centre,
Mr. Furutan,
Mr Varqa

Haifa



Fred
Schechter
at
International
Teaching
Centre

Haifa



is the room that I stayed in as a pilgrim.

Fred
Schechter
and family



Fred
Schechter,
Ruhiyyih
Khanum
Hooper,
Dunbar

Haifa



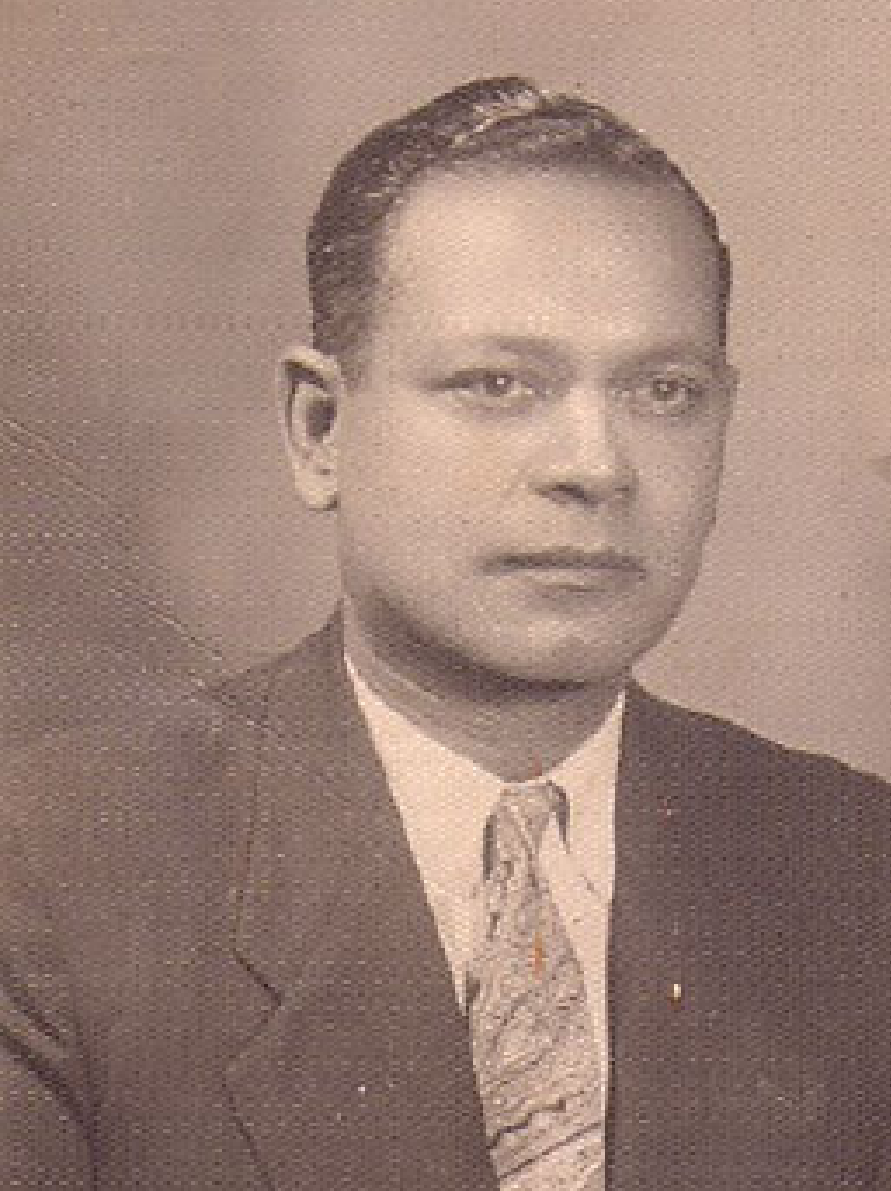
Fred
and
Julia
Schechter



Sabri and Raissa Elias

Sabri Elias (1906-1995) from Egypt pioneered to Ethiopia in 1933 before being forced to return with the Italian invasion in 1935. Shoghi Effendi told him "You have returned victorious and triumphant - because you were the cause of linking the north of Africa to the south." Sabri married Fatimah Raissa (1920-2014) in 1941, and in 1944, they returned to Addis Ababa with their two young children, where they acquainted Emperor Haile Selassie I with the Bahá'í Faith.

(Based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 58)



Sabri
and
Raissa
Elias



Sabri and Raissa Elias

In early 1954, Shoghi Effendi asked the Bahá'ís of Addis Ababa to send a family to Djibouti, left vacant when Fred Schechter could not stay. Sabri and Raissa volunteered, enrolled their two oldest children in a boarding school, sold everything possible, but were told that the Government in Djibouti did not like Egyptians and would not let them stay.

Sabri and Raissa Elias

Raissa dreamed that she met the Báb, who told her "*Rest assured! Do not grieve! You will pioneer and settle. You will obtain the residence permit within one month - thirty days to be exact.*" They arrived with their two youngest children on 6 May 1954 during a time of intense heat. They had very little money and no permanent place to live. On the thirteenth day they received their residence visas. The same day, an Egyptian family returning to Alexandria agreed to trade their furnished house in Djibouti for a house the Elias's owned in Alexandria and could not sell.

(Based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 59)

Sabri and
Raissa Elias

in train to Djibouti
ca. 1955



Sabri and Raissa Elias

The first two years were difficult, with persecution, insults, mobs and stones thrown. In 1955, Shoghi Effendi asked all the Bahá'í communities to send protest cables to the Shah of Iran about persecution there. The postmaster informed the town clerk, who asked for some literature on this Bahá'i Faith. A month later, Sabri was told by the Clerk "Your religion is immaculate because Bahá'ís absolutely do not interfere in political matters." They managed to form a Local Spiritual Assembly in Djibouti in 1956.

(Based on Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 60)

Sabri and Raissa Elias
and family

ca. 1955



Sabri and Raissa Elias

The Elias family remained in Djibouti until 1959, returning to Egypt for the education of their children. In 1968 they moved to Libya for three years. At the Bahá'í Continental Conference in Nairobi in 1976, they offered to pioneer anywhere except Djibouti. Enoch Olinga said that no-one else was capable of serving in Djibouti. Then they received a letter from the Universal House of Justice blessing their return to Djibouti. They were back in Djibouti in May 1977 and remained for 11 more years.

Sabri and
Raissa Elias

Djibouti
1983





Sabri and Raissa Elias – Djibouti 1986

Sabri and Raissa Elias

They returned to Alexandria when Sabri was 82 years old, and he passed on 22 October 1995. Raissa continued teaching, including in Morocco and Syria, before returning to Egypt and passing on 28 June 2014.

Sabri and Raissa Elias

1994



