

French Polynesia

Society Islands, Tuamotus, Marquesas

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Geography – French Polynesia

French Polynesia

The French Overseas Territory today called French Polynesia consists of the Society Islands, the Marquesas Islands to the north, Tuamotu Archipelago of about 80 atolls to the east formerly called the Low Islands, Gambier Islands, and the Austral Islands to the south, totalling 121 islands of which 75 are inhabited. The total land area is about 3,500 sq km and the population 300,000.

French Polynesia



Bora-Bora

French
Polynesia

Ua Huka

Rurutu

Tubuai

Gambier

Google

French Polynesia

The Polynesians reached the Marquesas Islands in about 200 BC and the Society Islands about AD 300. The islands were colonized by France in 1842, and are now considered an overseas country of France. French is the official language.

Tablets of the Divine Plan

A party speaking their languages, severed, holy, sanctified and filled with the love of God, must turn their faces to and travel through the three great island groups of the Pacific Ocean—**Polynesia**, Micronesia and Melanesia, and the islands attached to these groups, such as New Guinea, Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Philippine Islands, Solomon Islands, Fiji Islands, New Hebrides, Loyalty Islands, New Caledonia, Bismarck Archipelago, Ceram, Celebes, Friendly Islands, Samoa Islands, **Society Islands**, Caroline Islands, **Low Archipelago**, **Marquesas**, Hawaiian Islands, Gilbert Islands, Moluccas, Marshall Islands, Timor and the other islands.

Society Islands

Tahiti includes the capital city of Papeete with 137,000 inhabitants, 69% of the whole population.

Other important islands besides Tahiti in the Society Islands group include Mo'orea, Raiatea, Huahine, Bora Bora, Taha'a, and Tetiaroa. The 9 main high islands are volcanic in origin, and there are 5 atolls.



Tahiti



Tahiti



Tahiti



Tahiti



Tahiti



Mo'orea seen from Tahiti



Mo'orea



Mo'orea



Mo'orea



Mo'orea



Raiatea



Raiatea



Raiatea



Tetiaroa

Knights of Bahá'u'lláh Society Islands

Two Australians over 60, Gretta Stevens Lamprill (1890-1972) and Gladys Parke (1896?-1969) arrived in Tahiti on 29 October 1953. Gretta was the first Tasmanian Bahá'í in 1924 and raised the first Spiritual Assembly in Hobart in 1944, served on the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia 1948-1953, and was one of 6 of its members to pioneer in 1953. Gladys had learned of the Faith from Gretta, and they were close friends, pioneering together. Their visas only allowed them to stay 3 months at a time, so they had to leave and return 3 times, staying 6 months on their fourth visa, and seeing the first Local Spiritual Assembly elected before their final departure.



Gretta Stevens Lamprill

Gretta
Lamprill



Gladys
Parke



Gladys Irene Parke

Daniel Haumont

Daniel Haumont (1925-1993) became a Bahá'í in the Marquesas Islands in early 1955, and travelled to Maré in the Loyalty Islands near New Caledonia on 11 October 1955, becoming a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh. He only stayed for two weeks before deciding that he “could not make his life there” and returned to Tahiti.



Tuamotu Archipelago

The Tuamotus form a chain of low atolls or coral islands about 2,000 km long, with a total land area of 850 sq km on 400 islands on 130 atolls scattered across an area the size of Europe. Two atolls in the Tuamotus, Moruroa and Fangataufa, were made famous as sites for the French testing of nuclear weapons from 1962 to 1996. The population of the Tuamotus was less than 10,000 in 1953.

Tuamou Archipelago





Rangiroa Atoll - Tuamou



Rangiroa Atoll - Tuamou



Marokau Atoll - Tuamou



A unique atoll in Tuamou Archipelago

Knights of Bahá'u'lláh Tuamotu Archipelago

Jean Sevin (1927-2022), who had become a Bahá'í in Lyon, France, in 1944, offered to go to the Tuamotu Archipelago, and Shoghi Effendi said that “the work he could accomplish in France could not compare with what he would be doing for the Cause by pioneering in a virgin territory.” He wrote that Jean’s pioneering would prove to be a bounty for France, and Jean did make many teaching trips back to France. Jean Sevin said: “If I had remained in France, I might have given the message to a dozen persons in the last five years, but because I went pioneering I have been able to give the message to more than 3,000 in a few months.”

Jean Sevin 1975



Jean Sevin

Jean sailed from France on 10 November 1953, and was joined in Panama by Roy and Elena Fernie going to the Gilbert and Ellis Islands. After a month at sea, Jean arrived in Tahiti, meeting Gladys Parke and Gretta Lamprill. The night after his arrival, he met a girl named Liliane in a night club, and when she asked why he had come, explained to bring a new religion, the Bahá'í Faith. Liliane replied that her mother was a Baha'i, Ariane Drollet, who had been taught the Faith by John and Louise Bosch in 1920. Jean married Liliane in Papeete in 1962, and Ariane died soon after.

Jean Sevin

Jean reached the Tuamotus on 17 January 1954 and settled first on Makemo Island, with travel between islands by rare schooners, looking without success for receptive souls. After months of searching for employment, he found a job in October 1955 as rat exterminator, since rats ate the copra (from coconuts), the principal export. The work took him for months at a time to many atolls. He first found a radio operator who accepted the Bahá'í Faith in November 1955, and along with three native believers made efforts to spread knowledge of the Faith to a hundred islands in the four years he stayed in the Tuamotus.

Jean Sevin

“Divine assistance is unfailing for the pioneer who turns constantly towards the world of the Kingdom. Such will be his faith, his patience, his supplications - while living his life – such will be his powers. An instant of neglect of the implications of his divine mission and divine assistance will no longer come in the same way. Over all obstacles, he can be assured of final victory but only to the extent that he tries each instant to fulfil his sacred mission, as demanded by the Master and embodied in His *Tablets of the Divine Plan*.” (Jean Sevin, 1955, provisional translation)

Jean Sevin

“He only needs faith, patience and love. But also absolute detachment from all material things. And from his effort to keep his eyes on the Kingdom, on the only indispensable goal, and supported by the celestial concourse, will depend the rapidity of his victory. Have we tried hard enough? Then the Beloved will draw forth souls to whom we can convey the light. Pray, love, try to be detached, this is the only method.” (Jean Sevin, 1955, provisional translation)

Jean Sevin
1980



Jean Sevin

Jean Sevin moved to Papeete in 1957 to be with his father, staying until 1968, and also travelling among the French-speaking territories of the Pacific: New Hebrides, French Polynesia and New Caledonia, and on teaching trips to France. In 1968 he moved to Noumea, New Caledonia, at the request of the Universal House of Justice, and passed away there on 18 December 2022.



National Spiritual Assembly South West Pacific 1975

Marquesas Islands

The Marquesas Islands are volcanic, with Ua Pou reaching 1,230m above sea level. The capital is on Nuku Hiva, and other islands are Ua Huka, Hiva 'Oa, Fatu Hiva and Tahuata, with an area of about 1,000 sq km and a population of 9,000. They are remarkably dry with poor rainfall.



Marquesas Islands



Marquesas Islands



Marquesas Islands

Knights of Bahá'u'lláh Marquesas Islands

Gretta Jankko (1902-1973), originally from Finland but living in Canada and translating the Bahá'í writings into Finnish for Shoghi Effendi, chose to go to the Marquesas Islands, the least known virgin goal assigned to the Canadian community. The islands were isolated and difficult to visit, but she managed to get the authorities in Tahiti to give her an 8 month visa. She arrived on a small supply ship in March 1954. She lived in a small room, eating bananas and breadfruit, only rarely meat, butter, eggs and milk. While not speaking French, she mentioned Bahá'u'lláh to anyone she could.

Gretta Jankko
in 1972



Gretta Jankko

“All the time on those islands I was very happy. I loved the people and we were very close to each other; they asked me many times not to go away from the islands. My typewriter was a miracle to them; they would sit on the floor silently for long hours as I typed the translations. An old seaman, who knew some English, was the interpreter, but how much he understood of what I was saying, I never knew. We would talk about the great happenings of this Day of God. They had their Bibles, and I tried to show them important prophecies which were fulfilled.”

(quoted in Earl Redman, 2017, “*The Knights of Bahá’u’lláh*”, p, 223)

Gretta Jankko

“The older generation could not read or write; they would nod their heads and were eager to listen. They felt something, I am sure, but how much they grasped I cannot say. They used to stand in awe before the Greatest Name, and the small children almost every morning brought fresh flowers ‘for the Prophet’, placing them before the picture of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. I told them every time that it was the great Son of the Prophet, the Master; but each morning they would repeat, ‘for the Prophet’.”

(quoted in Earl Redman, 2017, “*The Knights of Bahá’u’lláh*”, p, 223)

Gretta Jankko

With her visa about to expire, she returned to Tahiti, and obtained a last visa after which she would have to leave. One night, someone broke into her room and almost strangled her to death. She was told to leave immediately in 1955 as they could not be responsible for her safety.

Trials and suffering

The greater your trials and sufferings, the stronger should wax your attachment and devotion to the Cause. For only through repeated tribulations and trials does God test His servants, and these they should therefore view as blessings in disguise, and as opportunities whereby they can acquire a fuller consciousness of the Divine Will and Purpose.

Shoghi Effendi

(From letter dated February 23, 1939, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer)