

Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia)

Southern Africa

Teaching the Bahá'í Faith

Bahá'í Geography - Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia)

The Republic of Zimbabwe, formerly Southern Rhodesia, is a landlocked country in Southern Africa, between the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers, bordered by South Africa to the south, Botswana to the southwest, Zambia to the north, and Mozambique to the east.

Zimbabwe



Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia)

The central plateau (high veld) is 1,000-1,600 metres, with mountainous Eastern Highlands and Mount Nyangani reaching 2,592 metres. The Victoria Falls on the Zambesi River are in the extreme northwest. The climate is sub-tropical.

Zimbabwe
relief map





Zimbabwe – Victoria Falls

Zimbabwe
satellite
image





Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia)

The population today is 15 million, with the capital and largest city Harare, and the second largest Bulawayo.













Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia)

The Great Zimbabwe city state was a major trade centre in the 11th century but abandoned by the 15th century. The British South Africa Company conquered and ruled from 1893 to 1923, when it became the British Colony of Southern Rhodesia. The white minority government declared independence in 1965, leading to a guerilla war with the black population until Zimbabwe was created in 1980.





Knights of Bahá'u'lláh

It was not easy to pioneer to Southern Rhodesia. The first Knight of Bahá'u'lláh was Ezzatu'llah Zahra'i, but he could only stay 40 days. Next was Claire Gung, “Mother of Africa”, who stayed nearly three years and saw the formation of the first Local Spiritual Assembly. ‘Aynu’d-Din and Tahireh ‘Ala’i joined Claire in December 1953 but could only stay until the following April. Kenneth and Roberta Christian arrived on 1 January 1954, but financial difficulties forced them to leave after seven months.

Ezzatu'llah Zahra'i

Ezzatu'llah Zahra'i (1926-) from an Iranian Bahá'í family planned to go to Mexico but 'Shoghi Effendi urges him to go to Africa for the teaching work'. He travelled to Tanganyika (now Tanzania) in November 1952 and received a one month visa, going then to Kenya.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)



Ezzatu'llah Zahrai



Ezzatu'llah Zahra'i

He joined Richard St.Barbe Baker in driving to Kampala for the Intercontinental Teaching Conference in February 1953.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)



Richard St. Barbe Baker, Nairobi 1953

Ezzatu'llah Zahra'i

Consulting the map of Shoghi Effendi's goals, he and Enayat Sohaili chose to go to Mozambique and went to Lorenço Marques on 14 April. In a few days, Ezzat was arrested by the secret police, all his books and papers were confiscated, he was jailed and expelled on 29 May 1953.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Ezzatu'llah Zahra'i

Ezzat managed to get visa for Northern Rhodesia with a 24-hour transit in Southern Rhodesia. By chance the Police Formalities officer there had lived in Iran, banked where Ezzat had worked, and gave him a 20-day visa. He continued to Salisbury (now Harare) and cabled Shoghi Effendi that he was at his post, not knowing that he was the first pioneer to arrive. Under unwritten apartheid policy he could not teach, but went to the park each evening to pray that the people would discover the Faith.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Ezzatu'llah Zahra'i

Ezzat applied for a residence permit, but had to leave the country after only 40 days and wait, so he spent July and August 1953 in the Belgian Congo. When the permit was refused, he moved back to Kenya and settled in Mombasa on the coast until going on pilgrimage in May 1957. Shoghi Effendi asked him to go to Egypt for two weeks to update and encourage the isolated Baha'i community. He then travelled through Europe, settled in Paris, married Annette Riis, and remained there for the rest of his life.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)



Ezzatu'llah Zahrai in later years

Claire Gung

Claire Gung (1904-1985) was born in Germany, moved to England in 1930, and became a Bahá'í in 1939 after caring for a terminally-ill Bahá'í who said many prayers aloud. When Shoghi Effendi asked England to open Africa in 1950, she was one of the first to respond, although she was told that a woman in Africa could not do what she had done in England. She found a job as a matron in a boy's school in Lushoto, Tanganyika (now Tanzania).

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Claire Gung
and
Jalal
Nakhjavani
in
Tanganyika





Aziz Yazdi, Claire Gung and Ted Cardell

Claire Gung

She sailed for Africa on 3 January 1951. She had many doubts and had emptied her heart in a letter to Shoghi Effendi, whose reply was waiting on her arrival.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

The Guardian to Claire Gung

“You have voiced the same suffering, the sign of the same mystery, as has been voiced by almost all those who have been called upon to serve God. Even the Prophets of God, we know, suffered agony when the Spirit of God descended on them and Commanded them to arise and preach. Look at Moses saying ‘I am a stutterer!’ Look at Muhammad rolled in his rug in agony! The Guardian himself suffered terribly when he learned he was the one who had been made the Guardian.”

(Letter on behalf of the Guardian, Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

The Guardian to Claire Gung

“So you see your sense of inadequacy, your realisation of your own unworthiness, is not unique at all. Many, from the Highest to the humblest, have had it.

(Letter on behalf of the Guardian, Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

The Guardian to Claire Gung

“Now the wisdom of it is this: it is such seemingly weak instruments that demonstrate that God is the Power achieving the victories and not men. If you were a wealthy, prominent, strong individual who knew all about Africa and looked upon going out there as fun, any services you render, and victories you have, would be laid to your personality, not to the Cause of God! But because the reverse is true, your services will be a witness to the Power of Bahá’u’lláh and the Truth of His Faith.”

(Letter on behalf of the Guardian, Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 97-106)

The Guardian to Claire Gung

“Rest assured, dear sister, you will ever increasingly be sustained, and you will find joy and strength given to you, and God will reward you. You will pass through these dark hours triumphant. The first Bahá’í going on such an historic mission could not but suffer – but the compensation will be great!”

(Letter on behalf of the Guardian, Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Claire Gung

For two years, Claire was the only Bahá'í in her part of Tanganyika, and life was difficult with apartheid and racism. In early 1953 she moved to Nairobi. In February, she attended the Intercontinental Teaching Conference in Kampala, and was inspired to pioneer to the goal of Southern Rhodesia, arriving on 6 October 1953. When she went to the post office to cable the Guardian of her arrival, she got in the wrong line, for blacks. She found a job as a housekeeper and governess, and by a miracle, got a residence permit.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Claire Gung

In January 1955, Claire went on pilgrimage and met the Guardian. She worried at her lack of teaching success, but 'he countered by stating that, on the contrary, she was the "Mother of Africa".' On 20 March two Africans declared, and at Ridvan a month later the first Local Spiritual Assembly was formed.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Claire Gung

In April 1956, Claire moved her pioneer post to Nyasaland (now Malawi) to support Enayat Sohaili who had pioneered there three years before. There were no good jobs or housing, so she worked in hotels, a hospital and several homes. Enayat was forced to leave in early 1957, and Claire stayed until July, when she moved to Kampala, Uganda.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Claire Gung

In Kampala, Claire worked in the Aga Khan Nursery school for three years before founding her own kindergarten, collecting soda bottle caps, match boxes and match sticks to teach children the numbers and alphabet. The school was on the King's domain, and soon some of the royal children were her students. By 1962 the kindergarten was well known, with almost 200 children including those of the King, government ministers and other important people. She build a new and larger school in 1968 and trained a staff of ten Ugandans.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Claire Gung

In 1979, Claire had a dream in which Hand of the Cause Enoch Olinga, who lived in Kampala, was in great danger. Soon after, he and some of his family were murdered. Claire was the only pioneer left in Uganda, but she refused to leave her school. She remained until her death in 1985, and is buried near the grave of Enoch Olinga.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

'Aynu'd-Din and Tahireh 'Ala'i

Tahireh 'Ala'i (1906-1992) from Iran married 'Aynu'd-Din 'Ala'i (?-1982) in 1932 and went on pilgrimage in 1952, hearing of the Guardian's desire for pioneers in Africa. The couple went to the Intercontinental Teaching Conference in Kampala and decided to stay in Africa, first in Kenya, then in Mozambique, before moving to Southern Rhodesia, joining Claire Gung in Salisbury on 4 December 1953.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)



'Aynu'd-Din and Tahireh 'Ala'i

'Aynu'd-Din and Tahireh 'Ala'i

They were only allowed to stay until August 1954, when they returned to Nairobi, obtained residence visas, and helped to form the first National Spiritual Assembly of Kenya. They returned to Tehran in 1972, moved to France in 1979, where 'Aynu'd-Din was struck and killed by a car in 1982, and Tahirih died in 1992.

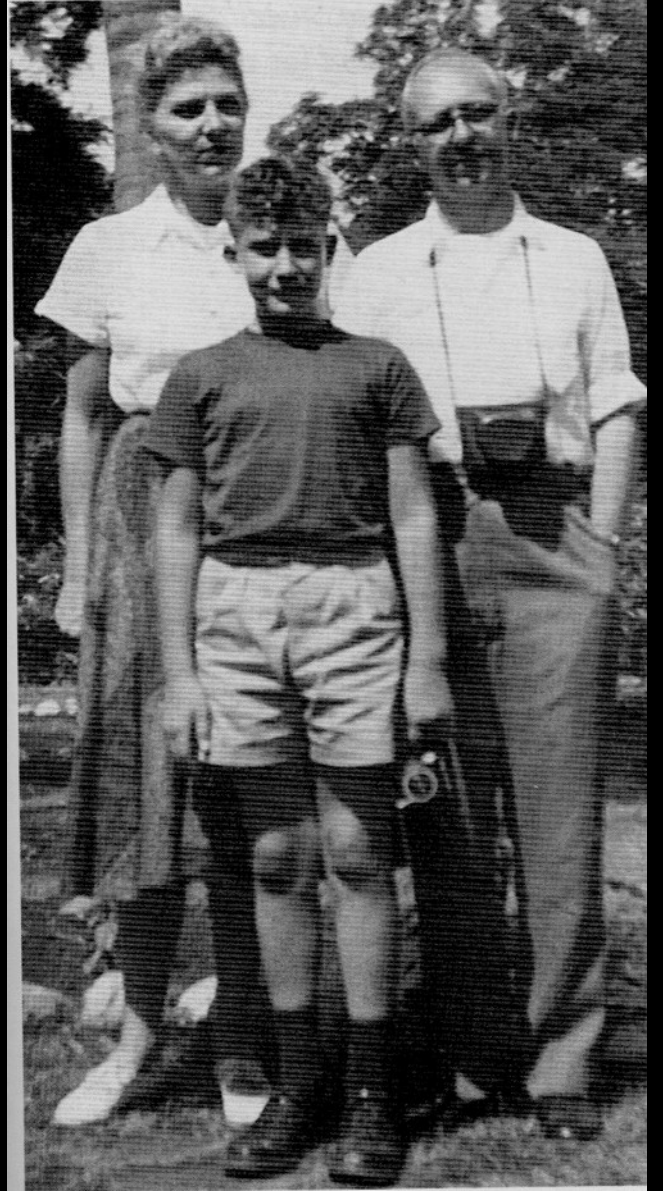
(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Kenneth and Roberta Christian

Kenneth Christian (1913-1959) was a college professor, lecturer and writer, serving on the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States. Roberta Christian (1913-1971) from New York state edited the *Bahá'í News* and wrote children's books. Wanting to pioneering in the Ten Year Crusade, the Guardian advised them to go to Southern Rhodesia, leaving by ship with their 12-year-old son Roger for the 19-day trip, arriving on 1 January 1954.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Roberta and Kenneth
Christian
and son Roger



Kenneth and Roberta Christian

While there was no law at that time segregating the races, most of the black people were uneducated and simply employed in white areas or living in mud huts on the reserves. The Guardian had warned the pioneers not to teach openly and to concentrate on the native population. The Christians made close friends of a Jewish couple, but never mentioned the Faith. When Hassan Sabri from Egypt came to visit and was dark-skinned, they hesitated to introduce him, but it turned out the Jewish man's mother was also born in Egypt.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Kenneth and Roberta Christian

Kenneth could not find a position, and their money was running out. When Dwight Allen, the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for Greece, had to leave his position at the University of Athens, Shoghi Effendi approved their moving to pioneer in Greece, where they arrived on 7 August 1954. They returned to America after three difficult years in 1957. Kenneth moved to Jakarta, Indonesia, and died in 1959. Roberta moved to California, and pioneered to Alaska in 1967, dying in 1971.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)

Kenneth and Roberta Christian

Only six months after the Christians left, when another pioneer couple arrived, did the Jewish couple learn of the Faith and become Bahá'ís in April 1955, in time to form the first Local Spiritual Assembly of Salisbury.

(Earl Redman, *The Knights of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97-106)