

Gathering of Collectors of Bahá'í Books, Manuscripts, and Papers

Firm Foundation Academy, North San Juan, CA * July 27-28, 2019

In person:

Peter Terry

David Piff

William Collins

Bryn Deamer

Virtual:

Ryan Perkins
Stanford University Library

Moojan Momen

Duane Troxel

Robert Stockman

Dorothy Frye

Alexander Meinhard

Kurt Asplund

Invited but unable to attend:

Payam Afsharian

Sholeh Quinn

Anthony Lee

Richard Hollinger

Peter Smith

Wendi Momen

Stephen Lambden

PURPOSE

The purpose of this conversation to encourage the collection and preservation of published, unpublished, and archival materials. It is intended to encourage individuals to collect materials or preserve their own records for the future and to donate to private, academic, or Baha'i institutions at the appropriate time when those institutions are able to house, preserve and provide access.

CAVEATS

Our gathering is not about instructing Baha'i institutions or telling them what they should be doing. At an appropriate time, after implementing some steps and demonstrating accomplishments, we will report to the Universal House of Justice, with a copy to the National Spiritual Assemblies under whose jurisdiction members of this network fall. Should those institutions wish to seek our advice or to advise us on useful steps, we will then consult on how best to advise Baha'i institutions.

This is not to reinvent the wheel of archival and library standards, nor to change established recommendations about what is historical and what should be preserved. The answer to most of the concerns below is dependent on the variable conditions of individuals, institutions, and collections, rather than something that can have one set of actions applied to them consistently.

We are not in favor of scan and dispose. Original documents should be preserved under most circumstances, because the objects themselves say something about the technology and carry a certain evidentiary value.

We encourage more networking to support book collecting; preserving manuscripts, personal papers, audio-visual materials, and Baha'i web presence.

TOPICS DISCUSSED:

Below are some topics about which we consulted and made some decisions about initial steps:

1. Historical records: paper, electronic, audiovisual materials

a. Institutional records.

- i. Various countries' Spiritual Assembly manuals should have information on types of records to be saved.
- ii. U.S. National Baha'i Archives manual.

b. Personal records include Correspondence, Diaries, Oral histories, News clippings, Email discussions, Book collections, Theses/Dissertations, Photos, Recordings of talks, Electronic & digital information, etc.

Questions and Answers:

Q: What to do about most national and local Baha'i archives, which do not have professional oversight of the records and collections?

A: Encourage Baha'is to become archivists. Wilmette Institute has an annual archives course.

Q: Why is the National Baha'i Archives Manual (U.S.) not available on the U.S. Baha'i administrative site?

A: It needs to be updated and more widely distributed. ACTION: Bill Collins will ask Ken Bowers (secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly) and Ed Sevcik (U.S. National Baha'i Archivist).

Suggestions for future consideration:

(1) Development of a local Baha'i archivists network.

(2) Creation of a Baha'i Historical Society.

2. Save the historical record

a. Find homes for personal collections of books and papers

i. Build the current largest collections, e.g. Stanford, UCLA, Afnan Library, Alexander Meinhard's German collection

ii. Review those institutions that have large Baha'i content and determine what is their intention for the future. ACTION: Participants could survey particular libraries to see what gaps there are. Specific individuals would need to be designated for direct contact with any of the target institutions.

iii. Befriend people who have Baha'i collections of books, manuscripts, and personal papers. Some are in the community and some may no longer be connected to the Faith. Urge them to contribute their collections to some permanent institutional collection.

b. Advance preparation for donation to libraries and archives

Reminders about Baha'is writing wills so that intentions are transmitted to inheritors. Better to have these intentions well in motion before death or declining mental capacity. They should negotiate donation to a Baha'i or academic institution or historical society while in full possession of their faculties.

Donors should weed out what anything they /do not want to give.

Restrictions should be kept to a minimum; they might include stipulations that certain records may only be accessed after a certain time. Wherever possible, provide as much arrangement and description as possible in advance.

ACTION: Peter Terry, David Piff, Bill Collins, Ala Moshiri, and Moojan Momen have offered to consult directly with those who have materials and wish to donate them to an institution.

Are others willing to be contacts?

We could then task these volunteers with approaching specific individuals known to have collections that could be valuable.

c. Unpublished manuscripts and translations in manuscript form:

- i. There are manuscripts that have not been timely to publish but need to be preserved.
- ii. There are handwritten notes that need to be transcribed, where only a few people can interpret or understand the notes, e.g. Malagasy translations of sacred writings. ACTION: Peter Terry will handle the Malagasy effort.

Questions/Suggestions:

Transfer of audiovisual items to digital. ACTION: Someone should identify best people who can do this conversion, send items to them to convert them, fund this, then transfer item and digital file to institution.

There is already a Facebook page for Baha'i Librarians and Archivists. Should there be a Facebook page for collectors of Baha'i historical materials? ACTION: Bill Collins will look at this.

Are Baha'i-related discussion lists being preserved? ACTION: Bill will ask Jonah Winters about what sites may be saving these. Baha'i Librarians, Archivists, Collectors, and Conservators need a web page in addition to Facebook pages. Bill Collins has retained all the files for the old Baha'i Librarians and Archivists site. Bill can update it to include a page about the issues we have identified for bibliophiles, collectors, and people with papers; and point strategically to areas of the site relating to libraries and archives.

ACTION: Restart the Baha'i Librarians and Archivists web page with its content about classification, archives, etc. Bryn Deamer has purchased a domain name for bahailibraryandarchives.org and will point it to his personal domain where we can store the website.

ACTION: The site will have to be redesigned for better presentation. Bill Collins will investigate what may be possible, perhaps engaging someone who can design web pages, working with Peter Terry regarding financial support.

Suggestion for future consideration:

Books and items related to Marjorie Morton and Mountfort Mills have been sold on Ebay. Consider creating a virtual collection of these items that were sold.

3. Support & Fund Institutional Collections

a. Improve/strengthen collections in:

- i. Library of Congress

- (1) The Library has a good English collection and everything in Persian and Arabic attacking the Baha'i Faith. What it is missing is pre-revolution Persian language publications; Persian materials published by Baha'i publishers outside Iran after the Revolution; and Arabic language Baha'i publications.
- (2) Tony Lee and Payam Afsharian may have some Persian and Arabic publications that are duplicates that could be shipped to Bill Collins to provide to the Library of Congress.
- (3) Bill Collins has been working through Mona Khademi to see if her contacts on the west coast can collect copies of books from a list Bill provided and ship them to Bill for donation.
- (4) Persian & Arabic language publications in Germany – inherited from a couple of people.

ACTION: Bill will connect with Alexander Meinhard to see what he may have that could be shipped to the U.S.

ii. Stanford University - collection of Baha'i materials

- (1) Curating of special collections requires donations be arranged and described, if possible, before donation; and be supported by some level of endowment.
- (2) We can choose what to donate, then Stanford vets the materials to remove any duplicates.

iii. UCLA

- (1) This is one of the largest collections of Baha'i materials in any library in the U.S.; it is our understanding that it is not a separate collection but part of the general collections.

ACTION: Ask Payam Afsharian and Tony Lee to send us information about the materials that UCLA has and what needs there may be.

iv. Other collections

Moojan Momen says most major libraries have similar gaps, especially regarding pre-revolution Persian Baha'i publications.

v. Grow collections through getting them via duplicate/exchange

- (1) Networking among those who want to assist to develop an institution's collection and those who have duplicates.
ACTION: Create a well-designed document in Google Docs that will be shared online with participants, with possibility of each being able to modify the spreadsheet with duplicates in their possession, and those they would like to get from others.
- (2) Duplicate lists are for the purpose of getting them into the hands of organized collections, either now, or when an individual is collecting with the declared purpose of donating their collection to an academic or Baha'i institution.

- (3) Set priorities for donating duplicates
 - (a) Baha'i International Library first; then other Baha'i or academic institutions.
 - (b) If there is no existing digital copy, make one before donating
- (4) Start/grow collections elsewhere:

i. General: Every university at which 'Abdu'l-Baha spoke in 1911-1913 should be reviewed for its Baha'i collections and looked at for possible collection development support.

ii. North America

ACTION: Bill Collins will try to coordinate with the attendees about creating downloaded spreadsheets of holdings in various institutions.

Middlebury College (VT) – This is the institution in the Vermont academic library consortium tasked with maintaining a Baha'i collection.

ACTION: Bill Collins, a graduate of Middlebury, will explore offering his collection of Baha'i books, periodicals, audiovisual material and dissertations to that institution.

Review Hathi Trust to determine what they have and download electronic versions if possible.

ABS North America library in Ottawa:

ACTION: Bill Collins will check on their library and see what they know about needs of Canadian institutions.

iii. Asia, Africa

Suggest supporting development of collections in Asia. Peter Smith suggests Taiwan or Singapore.

Peter Terry suggests Visva-Bharati University, in West Bengal, India; founder Rabindranath Tagore offered to Martha Root that a Baha'i Chair be established, ca. 1930s.

Japan & Korea

Peter Terry is in contact with Moshe Sharon of Hebrew University and will look into expansion of the Baha'i collection there. He also has contact with archives and libraries in Madagascar.

Indian subcontinent. The Baha'i Institute at Panchgani and two Baha'i chairs at universities – Indore, possibly another. Their collections of Baha'i materials should be investigated and then strengthened if possible. There was significant publication in Persian in the Indian subcontinent in the early 20 th century. – Moojan Momen has contacts in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

iv. Australasia

ACTION: Bryn Deamer will contact Graham Hassall about collections and collectors in Australasia.

v. Theological libraries worldwide

Perhaps attend American Theological Library Association (ATLA).

ACTION: Bill Collins will look into this.

c. Endow the collections at these institutions

i. Consider approaching potential donors by explaining some of the needs to endow curatorship of Baha'i special collections. (We have individuals in mind, although we will not note them here; this must be approached carefully).

d. Consider forming independent temporary repositories for Baha'i institutions

i. Create repositories overseen by interested individuals in trust for Baha'i institutions that are insufficiently developed to manage them yet, e.g.

Germany

1. Ask Alexander Meinhard about how such an arrangement might work.
2. Would this be something that would require a formal administrator or simply be what individuals offer?
4. Reports on specific Baha'i collections, how/what they collect, how they deal with Surpluses

Report from Moojan Momen on Afnan Library

1980 Mr Balyuzi wanted his books and papers turned into a Library for all who seek knowledge. Has a building that is adequate for near future. Don't have permanent librarian. Staffing needed to permit advertised open hours; currently open by appointment. Reference/research library only. Covers same areas as Mr. Balyuzi's original collection: Iranian culture, Islamic, Baha'i studies. Around 20,000 volumes; papers – 50 archives boxes of Balyuzi, 3 boxes of Faizi, and Hainsworth papers, etc. All English books listed, most of Persian/Arabic books listed. Subject classification is needed. Would like to have a proper library software catalog. Using a MS Access database file. Collecting Baha'i journals, especially Persian-language ones; English language and German language journals.

All collections currently are donated. Now they know what they have, they can see what they have that is surplus: in discussion with Cambridge, Oxford, others. Sell some excess at National Convention.

Report from Ryan Perkins on Stanford University

Ryan Perkins gave background to the collections at Stanford University; materials donated by Arden Lee and others. Processing is a challenge, so it is always helpful if gifts of materials or papers includes a donation to cover costs of processing.

Endowment funds of about \$5,000-\$6,000 per year can be used to purchase books; there are insufficient newer Baha'i publications to use up the annual amount.

It would be good to have an additional endowment for conferences and exhibits related to the Baha'i materials. A spotlight exhibit on some materials in the collection would require some financial support.

Additional donations do require that Stanford go through a process of de-duplication – removal of extra copies beyond the one copy needed in most cases.

The collection has about 200 works in Persian and Arabic.

There are deeds of gift that formalize each donation to the library.

Jacob Hill, a Baha'i in North Carolina, is working with the Digital Library of the Middle East, which will include some scanned Baha'i materials

Priorities for Stanford:

New publications

Rare materials that are in the public domain

Archival collections and papers

Some of the current endowment could be used for scanning and digitization, but additional funding is likely needed.

NOTE: Stephen Lambden has a very large collection of materials. It would be useful to consult on what plans he has for those materials.

Ryan Perkins met with some Baha'is at the temple in New Delhi, but it seemed that they didn't have clear plans for preservation, collecting, etc.

Suggestion: We set up some contacts with Baha'i collectors in India for Ryan's next trip to the subcontinent. He could also check out the libraries that Peter Terry visited where there are large collections of Baha'i materials, such as the Asiatic Society Library in Kolkata.

Has Ryan connected with people at other academic libraries who are interested in building Baha'i collections? Ryan suggests a place to connect would be Middle East Libraries Association (MELA) annual meeting; perhaps we can have one or two of our number attend.

Endowment of a professorship at Stanford would require \$5M-\$6M. Endowment of a library position would require about \$3M.

Stanford does not discard books that are the sole copies at the institution.

Report on private collection of Alexander Meinhard

Offers library cataloging system he is using to Afnan Library or others.

Scanning a large collection of materials from Hermann Grossmann.

Report on the Baha'i collection at UCLA

We have asked Payam Afsharian and Tony Lee to give a synopsis

e. Online:

i. David Haslip's website with scanned and OCR'd Bahai publications – bahai.works; de.bahai.works (German works).

ii. Jonah Winters' bahai-library.org.

f. Baha'i institutional libraries

i. Who can undertake some research on what is the current state of libraries at permanent Baha'i school properties (e.g. Green Acre, Louhelen, Bosch; Are there permanent schools in other countries?).

ii. Kurt reports that there was a published report in 1849 that sample writings of the Bab were sent to the American Oriental Society. He called the American Oriental Society, and the University of Michigan which has the AOS archives, but neither could indicate whether they had these. Patricia Fiskin, a retired librarian in Vermont, is expert at doing research and could be asked to work on this lead.

Send communication to Bill Collins (wpc09@hotmail.com) regarding needs as well as what you might be able to offer to a network.

Duane Troxel can digitize books; he is able to do about two per month.

Note from Bill Collins: We should remain aware of any copyright issues when doing this.

