

# Betty Becker Valiant Servant Pioneer



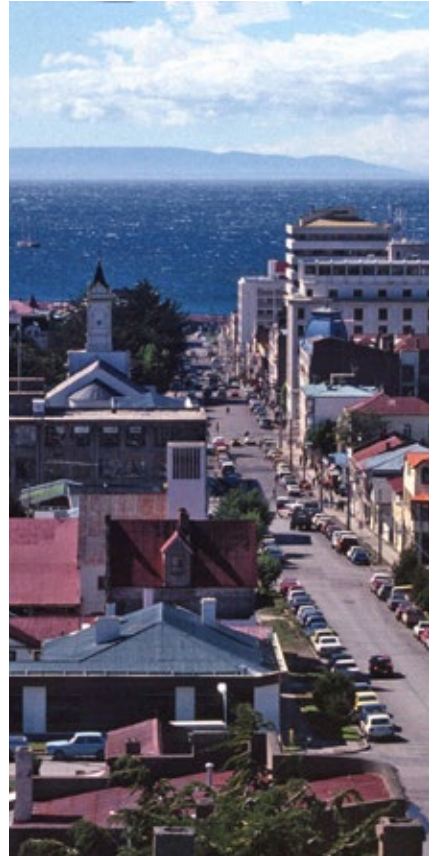
By  
Earl Redman



# Betty Becker Valiant Servant Pioneer



Alaska



Chile

By Earl Redman

The Green Igloo Press  
Earl Redman  
Alaska House  
Urney Lane  
Ballinagh  
Co. Cavan  
Ireland

Copyright ©2010 Earl Redman

All Rights Reserved

Cover photo courtesy of the National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska

©Afnan Library Trust, 2022

# PREFACE

My wife, Sharon O'Toole, son, Regan O'Toole, and I pioneered from Alaska to Valdivia, Chile in October 1989. We spent the first few weeks living with another pioneer, Louise Garnett, and looking for a place to live. On December 1, we moved into our own home—one with ample space, a telephone, a nice yard, fruit trees, a friendly landlord, and no hot water in the kitchen. We were finally able stop living out of suitcases and boxes. That lasted less than a week before we boarded a Chilean ferry to Punta Arenas, at the southern tip of Chile.

One of the tasks I had assigned to myself before leaving Alaska was to visit the Punta Arenas Bahá'í Center and write a story about its history. Several Alaskan communities were helping to support the Center financially at that time so it seemed like a worthwhile project.

But Punta Arenas provided me with much more than adventure and a single story. We stayed with Chuck and Linda French, pioneers who came to Chile from Alaska and who had also lived in Valdivia. They introduced us to Gwendolyn Willems, who had moved to Punta Arenas from Canada at the age of two, in 1908, and who had been on the first Local Spiritual Assembly in the town. Our reason for meeting her was to learn what we could of Betty Becker, the first Alaskan pioneer to Chile. We heard stories of Betty, but also learned that Gwendolyn had been

writing a history of the Bahá'í Faith in Punta Arenas which, at the time of our visit, had produced over 200 handwritten pages. She had been unable to find anyone who could type up her manuscript so I found myself with a thick sheaf of papers covered with cursive Spanish, which was to be typed up on my computer for her.

Linda French then took us to the Punta Arenas Bahá'í Center, which had been purchased through the efforts of Betty Becker. While going through boxes of Betty Becker's files in the attic of the Center, we stumbled onto a thick folder which contained hundreds of letters—the personal correspondence of Betty Becker. Within this bundle were letters signed by Shoghi Effendi and Rúhíyyih Khánum and by many Hands of the Cause. One letter carried the signatures of Hands of the Cause Mr. Faizí, Mr. Furutan, and Rúhíyyih Khánum. It was fascinating to read letters from former Universal House of Justice member Hugh Chance, Hands of the Cause Hermann Grossmann, Horace Holley, William Sears, and Leroy Ioas, and former Alaskans Honor Kempton and Janet Stout. There was a fascinating story of the life of an early Bahá'í pioneer to be extracted from these letters and this is an effort to tell that story.

# Table of Contents

Preface.....	5
Betty Becker, Valiant Servant.....	8
Hearing the Call .....	8
A First Test.....	10
Pioneering to Alaska .....	11
To Juneau and Sitka.....	12
Fairbanks.....	17
Anchorage .....	18
A Trip to Nome .....	20
Alaska’s First Local Spiritual Assembly .....	21
Pioneering to Chile.....	25
Arrival In Valdivia.....	27
A Valdivia Center .....	30
Problems with a Visa .....	31
The Move to Punta Arenas.....	34
The Lost Cartons.....	35
Settling In .....	36
Covenant Breakers.....	37
A Great New Friend .....	38
The London Conference.....	39
A Center for Punta Arenas.....	40
The Early 1960’s.....	41
The Problem with Teaching .....	41
Death of a Material Body But Life for A Bahá’í Center .....	45
Acknowledgements .....	49
Index.....	52
About the Author .....	54



*O ye blessed souls:*

*I desire for you eternal success and prosperity and beg perfect confirmation for each one in the divine world. My hope for you is that each one may shine forth like unto the morning star from the horizon of the world and in this garden of God become a blessed tree, producing everlasting fruits and results.*

*Therefore I direct you to that which is conducive to your heavenly confirmation and illumination in the Kingdom of God!*

*It is this: Alaska is a vast country; although one of the maidservants of the Merciful has hastened to those parts, serving as a librarian in the Public Library, and according to her ability is not failing in teaching the Cause, yet the call of the Kingdom of God is not yet raised through that spacious territory.*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan, April 8, 1916

# BETTY BECKER, VALIANT SERVANT

The year was 1959 in Anchorage, Alaska. Betty Becker was about to pioneer. It was nothing new, for she had been a pioneer before – she had traveled 3,000 miles north to Alaska in 1939 at the same time as Honor Kempton, answering a call from Shoghi Effendi for two pioneers to Alaska. Now, Betty was on her way to pioneer in Chile, at the opposite end of the earth, 8,500 miles to the south. Many Bahá'ís have pioneered to the far corners of the world. Many have gone alone. But how many have undertaken the sacrifice of beginning a completely new life in a totally new cultural setting – at the age of 73?

Because of her pioneering efforts and steadfastness, Betty was one of the early shining stars of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. She dedicated virtually her whole Bahá'í life to God in the service of pioneering. Betty became a Bahá'í when she was 46 and spent 34 of her next 41 years as a pioneer, ultimately leaving her physical remains in Punta Arenas, Chile.

## HEARING THE CALL

Matilda (Betty) Becker was born about December 25, 1887 (her actual date of birth is not known), in Moundridge, McPherson County, Kansas, 150 miles southwest of Kansas City, into a large German family who held strict orthodox Mennonite beliefs. Of her early years, she later said, “*As I review*

*my life right now it seems that I have been in search of truth even as a child. I would question why do religions differ so. Some people baptize under water, others sprinkle over their heads. Does this really bring the spirit of truth to them? I remember when my brother was baptized, who is a few years older than I, the first thing I did was to rush him to my room and ask him: ‘How do you feel?’ He said rather roughly: ‘What do you mean?’ And I asked him: ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit?’ He replied in no uncertain terms: ‘No, I did not. And don’t you ever go up there in front of the rest and make a fool of yourself.’ This confused me very profoundly and that was the start of my search of the truth.”<sup>1</sup>*

When Betty left home for college, she visited many different Protestant churches. She wrote: “*I had expected to find some special denomination in the Christian religion, and the idea of a New Prophet was very far from any expectation...For a while they called me Doubty Thomas.*”

Sometime in 1933, while working for an insurance company in Kansas City, Missouri, Betty saw an advertisement in a newspaper for a lecture by Orcella Rexford on food nutrition. “*I decided that I had to eat, so I might as well learn to eat correctly.*” During the first lecture, Ms. Rexford told the group that afterwards, for those who would be interested, she would tell them about something that

<sup>1</sup> The Bahá'í World, 1973-1976, p. 539



they had never heard of before. Betty the skeptic, said to herself, “*Oh, you little so and so, you cannot possible tell us something that none of us has heard.*” So she stayed to hear the “something” and to gloat. But Ms. Rexford told them of the Bahá’í Faith and, to Betty’s chagrin, no one there had ever heard of this new Faith. Initially, because of the common Christian belief that Christ was the only Prophet from God, Betty was highly skeptical, but determined to find out the basis of this religion. She attended all of Ms. Rexford’s lectures for two weeks and all of her Bahá’í talks, becoming more and more fascinated.

When Ms. Rexford left, she asked a friend, Ruth Moffett, to go to Kansas City and teach the Faith to the seekers. Betty later wrote that “*Ruth Moffett was one of the most patient women I have met in my life. She answered all our doubts and misgivings with the utmost care and wisdom.*” On November 11, 1933, with Ruth’s patient teaching, many of the seekers, including Betty, embraced the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

Initially they formed a group. Betty felt responsible for keeping the group active so she rented a room in a local hotel called “The Balcony” for use as a center. When Ruth returned to Kansas City in 1935, she helped the group form a Local Spiritual Assembly and Betty was elected chairman. Among the teachers who stopped by Kansas City were Horace Holley, Leroy Ioas, both of whom later were named Hands of the Cause, and Florence Mayberry, who became a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors and of the first International Teaching Centre.

Betty began attending summer schools at the Louhelen School near Flint, Michigan and these became a high point of her Bahá’í activities. Among the teachers she deepened with were Dr. and Madam Ali Khuli Khan and their daughter Marzieh Gail (a well-know Bahá’í author), Amelia Collins and Agnes Alexander (both of whom later became Hands of the Cause), and Emogene Hoagg (who had been travel teaching in Alaska during 1919 and 1920). At her first summer school, Mary Maxwell (later to become Rúhíyyih Khánum) gave a series of fascinating talks about the Dawnbreakers. At one point, Miss Maxwell spoke of visiting Haifa with her mother, May Maxwell. She described how she had gone one day to pray at the shrines with Shoghi Effendi. Once during the prayers, she had glanced over at Shoghi Effendi who was deeply immersed in his prayers. She immediately felt guilty for her intrusion. Betty, upon hearing this story from Miss Maxwell, suddenly heard an inner voice tell her: “*She will marry the Guardian.*” Thus, later when a telegram came to her Assembly that the Guardian had married and the secretary said that she’d never guess to whom, Betty surprised her by saying, “*Yes, I do know. He’s married to Mary Maxwell.*”

Betty had a number of other-worldly experiences during her life. One of the most memorable to her involved her boss, Mr. Gilmore, in Kansas City. She had gone to see him one day to write some letters and somehow religion came up. He stated

that he believed that Jesus was just a great man. Betty told him about the Bahá'í Faith, Bahá'u'lláh and His relationship to Jesus. They talked at length and didn't start even one letter. That night, Gilmore suddenly died. Betty went to the funeral and, while the preacher was talking, saw Mr. Gilmore approaching from a distance. He stopped right in front of her and silently said: "Give me His name, give me his name, please give me His name!" Betty softly whispered "Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh, Bahá'u'lláh." Mr. Gilmore turned and walked away repeating the name Bahá'u'lláh.

Orcella Rexford and Ruth Moffett made a number of visits to Kansas City. Ms. Rexford would also travel the 60 miles on the train to Kansas City to Topeka, and since the train was very fast and there was a beautiful swimming pool in Topeka, many of the Kansas City Bahá'ís would join her, have breakfast on the train, and listen to each other's Bahá'í talks and teaching stories. Some of Ms. Rexford's stories from her trip to Alaska in 1922 may have helped influence Betty's future.

## A FIRST TEST

In January, 1939, Betty was the recording secretary of the Kansas City Local Spiritual Assembly and faced her first big test as a Bahá'í – at the hands of other Bahá'ís. In a letter to Emogene Hoagg<sup>2</sup>, Betty explained how disunity had riven the community. One Bahá'í

<sup>2</sup> H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, Jan. 4, 1939, National Baha'i Archives, United States.

created such difficulties that a newly declared couple (brought into the Faith by Mrs. Hoagg) withdrew from the Faith. The disruptive Bahá'í and her husband sold some property to another Bahá'í family and it turned into "the most tangled up affairs I ever heard of and these two people feel they have lost practically everything on account of this and as they have not been in the Cause very long they too are turning against the teachings." The disunity was affecting the entire Kansas City community and Betty begged Mrs. Hoagg for advice, saying "what can be done is beyond my imagination unless a higher power takes a hand." She was, she said, "attending very few of the meetings, feasts etc and am beginning to feel that I am contributing to something that should be broken up and rebuilt if it is ever going to have a firm foundation."

Mrs. Hoagg responded<sup>3</sup>: "Dearest Betty, you are my first Bahá'í child to catch fire in Kansas City. To you comes the great opportunity of...helping each one of the beloved ones to understand these things". Mrs. Hoagg noted that "Bahá'u'lláh has decreed that the Spiritual Assembly must be tested, taught, tried, and raised to the place where they can become true Spiritual Houses of Justice. How can Kansas City measure up to her great destiny if there is such commotion when a few chips fly?" "This is your golden opportunity to be the beacon light for the friends and not be one of those running away and hiding in a shell...Please help each one to understand what a dreadful thing it is to be shaken by the winds of tests and become severed from

<sup>3</sup> H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, Feb. 3, 1939, National Baha'i Archives, United States.

INITIAL STAGE INAUGURATED TEACHING CAMPAIGN STILL UNTRAVERSED. END FIRST CENTURY RAPIDLY APPROACHING. ALASKA DELAWARE NEVADA SOUTH CAROLINA UTAH VERMONT WEST VIRGINIA MANITOBA NOVA SCOTIA STILL UNSETTLED. UNIVERSAL PROLONGED INTENSIFICATION PIONEER ACTIVITY CRYING NEED FATEFUL HOUR. ESTABLISHMENT ONE RESIDENT BELIEVER EACH VIRGIN TERRITORY PRECONDITION FULL LAUNCHING SUBSEQUENT EAGERLY ANTICIPATED STAGE AIMING SPIRITUAL CONQUEST SOUTHERN HALF WESTERN HEMISPHERE. CONCOURSE ON HIGH EXPECTANTLY AWAIT READY ASSIST ACCLAIM NINE HOLY SOULS WHO...WILL PROMPTLY FEARLESSLY VOLUNTEER TO FORSAKE HOMES CAST AWAY ATTACHMENTS DEFINITELY SETTLE THESE TERRITORIES LAY FIRM ANCHORAGE ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER UNDEFEATABLE FAITH.

SHOGHI EFFENDI, 24 January 1939

*the tree of life, especially in this impending world crisis.”*

Mrs. Hoagg concluded with a quotation from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Haifa<sup>4</sup>:  
*“When God calls a soul to a high station, it is because that soul has capacity for that station as a gift of God, and because that soul has supplicated to be taken into His service. No envies, jealousies, calumnies, slanders, plots or schemes, will ever move God to remove a soul from its intended place, for by the grace of God, such actions on the part of the people are the test of the servant, testing his strength, forbearance, endurance and sincerity under adversity. At the same time, those who show forth envies, jealousies, injustices toward a servant are depriving themselves of their own station, and another of his, for they prove by their own acts that they are not only unworthy of being called to any station awaiting them, but also prove that they cannot withstand the very first test...”*

<sup>4</sup> H. Emogene Hoagg Papers, Feb. 3, 1939, National Baha’i Archives, United States.

## PIONEERING TO ALASKA

Enkindled with the fire of the love of Bahá’u’lláh, Betty had a great desire to go pioneering, particularly to Alaska or South America. Therefore, when the Guardian sent an urgent cablegram to the United States on January 24, 1939, requesting pioneers to settle in nine specific unsettled goal areas in North America under the First Seven-Year Teaching Plan, Betty answered. Two pioneers were needed for Alaska and, along with Honor Kempton, Betty volunteered to go north.

Mr. Leroy Ioas, the chairman of the United States National Teaching Committee and who later served as a Hand of the Cause, wrote Betty inviting her to visit the summer school in Geyserville, California on her way to Alaska.



## To Juneau and Sitka

Betty used her time well before she left and took full advantage of people asking why she was going to Alaska. In her office alone, she introduced over 200 people to the Faith just by answering their questions.

Betty boarded a train for the 1,500-mile journey from Kansas City to San Francisco on July 11, 1939, where she was met by Leroy Ioas. Betty attended the Geyserville Summer School north of San Francisco between July 17 and July 25 and met many of the western Bahá'ís. On the 25th, Bahá'í friends took her to the train only to discover that part of her luggage had been left in Geyserville. They dashed back,

recovered the missing luggage and hurriedly returned only to miss the train by minutes. She boarded the next train to Seattle a day later and, during the night, noticed that the train had stopped. *“I inquired of the porter and he stated ‘We are taking on passengers from a derailed train that have been stranded here for nearly 24 hours.’ That was the train that I had missed! I felt very humble and grateful and very close to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.”*

On July 27, Betty sailed for Alaska from Seattle, a several day journey over 1,000 miles. While traveling north on the ship, Betty was fascinated by the country: *“I don’t think there is a more beautiful voyage in the whole world than on the boat going to Alaska. It is as if*

*a Master Hand divided the mountain and permitted the waters to run through!*"

Betty ate at a table with 12 other people. The group contained a reporter who was very interested in the Bahá'í Faith so it was commonly the principal topic of conversation at meal time. She thought his interest was just personal. When the ship docked in Juneau, Alaska, on August 1,

Betty got a room at a local hotel. The next morning at breakfast, she was shocked to read a story written by the reporter in a local newspaper: "*Betty Becker was on the boat and she is going to be in Juneau bringing you a new religion.*" The next day, another story came out under the headline "*To Establish Bahai Religion*":

*"Betty Becker, of Chicago, is a guest at the Baranof Hotel, arriving here from the south yesterday.*

*"Miss Becker expects to remain in Alaska 'two or three years', primarily in the interests of the Bahia [sic] faith, which she explained as a 'world wide cause for the realization of the oneness of mankind.*

*Miss Becker explained that one of the significant movements of the faith at present is the completion of a Bahia temple at Wilmette, Illinois, which architects represent as the embodiment of a symbolic form, teaching of unity in religion and all mankind.*

*If Miss Becker likes Alaska as much as she does now – she says it is 'wonderful' – she will seek a business opportunity and establish her home in Juneau."<sup>5</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> Daily Alaska Empire, August 2, 1939



Juneau, Alaska and Gastineau Channel

So much for her plans to teach quietly.

In 1939, Juneau was the Alaska territorial capital and had a population of fewer than 6,000 inhabitants. The Alaska Juneau gold mine, at that time the largest low-grade gold mine in the world, was the town's largest employer with almost 1,000 people on its payroll. Government, with its ancillary support occupations, and fishing were the other main employers. After her arrival, Betty wrote to Victoria Bedikian, who she called Auntie, and said that Juneau, "*with the bay on one side is completely encircled with towering mountains and I can see three waterfalls from my window that come down from way, way up somewhere...I love it here, there are no railroads, no streetcars and only the steamers that come and go and also bring our mail. It's such a delightful change coming from a city that was as hot as Kansas City when I left there. I love to listen to the echo of the boat and other whistles, they go on and on and on – it seems that every mountain reverberates the sound until it finally dies out in the far*



Downtown Juneau

distance.”<sup>6</sup>

Betty managed to find a large enough room in the Baranof Hotel so that she could teach the Faith. She wasn't the first Bahá'í to see Juneau. Agnes Alexander gave talks on the Faith in Southeast Alaska in 1905 and Margaret Green, working as a librarian, lived in Juneau between June, 1915, and June, 1918, and was the first Bahá'í to live there. Susan Rice spent the summer of 1916 travelling to Fairbanks, Dawson and Fairbanks, but did not make it to Juneau.

In 1919, Emogene Hoagg and Marion Jack took a steamer to Nome

<sup>6</sup> Papers of Victoria Bedikian, Sept. 3, 1939, National Baha'i Archives, United States.

then continued up the Yukon River Fairbanks, Dawson and Whitehorse. From Whitehorse, they crossed over the mountains to Skagway then went on to Juneau. The two women spent eight months teaching the Faith throughout their 6,000-mile journey. They gave talks in hotels, private homes, on the sidewalk, restaurants, women's clubs, schools, a fancy masked ball and even a barber shop.<sup>7</sup>

Orcella Rexford arrived in Juneau in July of 1922. She also traveled to Skagway, Whitehorse and Dawson. From Juneau, she journeyed to Anchorage where she gave a series of lectures, the final one of which was about the Bahá'í Faith. In her audience was a dentist named Gayne V. Gregory, who became the first recorded person to declare his faith in Bahá'u'lláh in Alaska and, in November, also became her husband.

Orcella and Gayne returned in 1923 and stayed in Anchorage until the end of 1924.<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting to note that all of these early travel-teachers and pioneers, were women.

Honor Kempton arrived in Juneau on April 18, 1939 and stayed until May 30. She found work in a bookstore but one day had a strange experience: “*I was putting away the books before closing time when I heard a clear voice say, ‘Do the same thing in Anchorage.’ I looked around to the spot from whence the voice had come*

<sup>7</sup> Bahá'í World, Vol X, 1944-46, pp. 522-523.

<sup>8</sup> John E. Kolstoe, Alaskan Bahá'í Community: Its Growth and Development, pp. 1-9-11.

*but there was no one there.*” Honor asked the shop owner if opening a book store in Anchorage would be a good idea. The shop keeper not only agreed, but also showed Honor her catalogs and gave her much good advice.<sup>9</sup> Honor left Juneau on May 30th, getting onto the ship from which a lady named Janet Whitenack debarked. Janet later became Honor’s first new Bahá’í in Anchorage. Honor also left Betty a list of her friends so Betty could make new friends quickly.

Betty would visit almost every boat that arrived to teach the Bahá’í Faith. She started a weekly fireside in her hotel room on August 31 with “*six of us present and everyone was so open-minded.*”<sup>10</sup>

Betty wrote Aunt Victoria that Honor Kempton had recently opened a lending library in Anchorage and had brought in her first Bahá’í, Janet Whitenack (later to become Stout), originally from New York, who had moved to Fairbanks to teach. Betty also started to write a book of fiction.

Shortly after her arrival in Juneau, Betty received a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi dated July 31, 1939, which said: “*... This truly exemplary response you have made to his call for pioneer teaching has evoked in his heart feelings of indescribable joy and gratitude, and he will earnestly pray and supplicate on your behalf, that Bahá’u’lláh’s guidance and confirmations may sustain and bless you in your noble efforts, and enable you*

<sup>9</sup> Alaska Bahá’í News, May 1981, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Papers of Victoria Bedikian, Sept. 3, 1939, National Bahá’í Archives, United States

*to attain your heart’s most cherished desire in His service.*

*“The field of teaching in which you have chosen to work, though remote and as yet entirely unexplored, is most promising, but requires considerable effort, patience, and an iron determination to overcome every obstacle, of whatever nature, that would inevitably arise in the course of one’s sojourn in such a climatically inhospitable and economically still undeveloped country.”*

In a postscript, the Guardian added: “*How great your privilege, how arduous your task, how marvelous your spirit! I wish to assure you in person of my special, my constant and ardent prayers in your historic mission, and entreat you not to feel discouraged at the sight of the formidable obstacles facing you. Persevere, and rest assured that your work will be richly blessed and extolled by future generations if you remain unafraid, and determined in your glorious task. I would ever be delighted to learn of the progress of your work.*”

Though she made friends quickly, the newspaper story caused her unforeseen problems. The ministers of the Juneau churches quickly banded together and frustrated Betty’s every attempt at finding work. A month after her arrival, on August 31, she gave her first fireside, at the home of Alice and Frank Guertin. One day, while inviting a man to her fireside, he “*told me he had heard of me and expected to find the usual encrusted religionist and ‘it was refreshing’ to find someone that is ‘like real people.’ I asked who told him about me and he remarked ‘Oh, you don’t know how well known you are in Juneau.’*”

Her teaching efforts, however, brought no obvious results. In a letter to Shoghi Effendi, she stated: “*I am striving diligently to interest the people that...live in Juneau proper, and while they listen attentively and do not seem to disagree with me, yet they do nothing about it and I feel that very few read the literature I give them.*” She also noted about Juneau: “*This seems to be a most materially minded little city with all the fanfare of a large city. The people are so busy with their social and other affairs they simply do not have, or will not take time to come to firesides or study classes... Most everyone knows everybody else and it is a constant merry-go-round of bridge games, parties and dances. I have yet to meet my first person that does not drink and there is a bar practically every other door.*”

One day she crossed the bridge that stretches between Juneau and Douglas Island, “*at a loss as to how to proceed further as I had exhausted practically all my efforts in finding employment or making new contacts...*” Upon turning back towards Juneau, she saw a brilliant rainbow extending from one mountain to another and casting a shimmering reflection in the bay. “*To me it was a rainbow of promise...*”

After several months of trying to teach the Faith in Juneau, Betty decided that she should move to Sitka, 90 miles west on Baranof Island, in hopes of finding work and a more receptive environment. She wrote Shoghi Effendi about the change and received the following letter written on his behalf and dated December 28, 1939: “*He was pleased to note the*

*account of your teaching work in Juneau during the past three months, and feels that in spite of the meager results so far accomplished and notwithstanding the many obstacles that still confront your work, you are bound, if you persevere, to eventually succeed in opening this virgin territory to the light of the Cause. The conditions, social and otherwise, under which you are called upon to labour are admittedly most difficult and delicate, but the greater the number and force of such obstacles, the more abundant will be also the confirmations which Bahá'u'lláh will shower upon you, enabling you thereby to triumph over all these difficulties, and to valiantly and effectively establish His Faith.*

“*The Guardian approves of your suggestion to leave Juneau for some time, should you fail to secure there a suitable position, and to teach instead, even though temporarily, in Sitka or any other nearby town in Alaska. His prayers will accompany you throughout your journey, and it is hoped that through them you will receive the necessary strength and guidance to effectively carry out this high teaching mission you have undertaken to accomplish in so distant and yet so promising a field.*”

In a postscript, Shoghi Effendi wrote: “*Your most welcome letter cheered my heart. I truly am touched, encouraged, and impressed by the spirit animating you in your valued and historic activities. I will specially and continually pray for you from all my heart. Rest assured and redouble your noble and deeply-appreciated efforts. The Beloved will guide your steps and shower His manifold blessings upon your work if you*



*stand fast and determined in your glorious service to Him.”*

Her overnight voyage to Sitka, in March, 1940, gave a chance to relax and really enjoy herself. The ship had a nice orchestra and, since there were many men aboard but few single women, she was able to dance nearly the whole night. Between dances, she watched the “*beautiful waters sparkling.*”

In Sitka, Betty knew the owners of one hotel since they also owned a hotel in Juneau, so she went there for a room. “*I had often yearned to live near the water,*” she wrote, and her room in the back of the hotel looked out on the bay. After her first night, she awoke. “*I can never forget when I woke up in the morning. At first I would open my window...and just sit there. I would peer into the darkness and watch the bright moon as it set before me. I sat there for a total of three hours, as if in a trance, and during which time the golden Orb of the sun would rise to my other side, again over the waters, whose sound I could always hear lapping under my feet. Oh! That sunrise. I sat there and stared stupefied. It was as a scene from the Gods. I was entranced all day after that. This was like a golden Welcome from on high as I had been depressed after what occurred in Juneau. I shall always love Sitka.*”

Later, however, she met a man on the street who asked if she was Betty Becker, recently arrived from Juneau. When she answered “yes,” he told her that the ministers in Juneau had already advised the ministers of Sitka of her coming and not to permit her to find employment. Indeed, during her three-month stay, she was stymied in her

attempts to work. She did manage to do some limited stenographic work and hold firesides in her hotel room.

One day Betty was introduced to another guest in her hotel who asked if she was the Betty Becker from Juneau. When she said yes, he remarked “*That you are teaching a religion that is a myth. The people of Juneau like you personally but they feel sorry for you. Your teaching has no foundation and the Prophet you claim to follow did not really exist.. He advised me. . .to look into this and not be fooled.*”

## Fairbanks

In June, 1940, Betty gave up on Southeast Alaska and moved to Anchorage to join Honor Kempton and open a book store. But before she could settle in, Joy Allen, a Bahá’í in charge of personnel for the Army Quartermaster’s Office at Ladd Field in Fairbanks, called and asked her to take a job there. So Betty moved on to Fairbanks, in the center of Alaska. Fairbanks was another gold mining town and had a population of about 3,500 people in 1940. With the coming of the war, the population increased rapidly.

Betty evidently flew to Fairbanks over the Alaska Range then found a room in a hotel where Janet Whitenack had a book store. She worked with Janet and also found a little work of her own. On the first Sunday after her arrival, a man she had met on the boat to Anchorage invited her to his church. After the service, she was introduced to the minister who said ominously:

“Miss Becker, did you say? We have been expecting you for some time.”

During the winter of 1940/1941, a professional ice skater offered to teach her to skate. He felt her experience with dancing would make Betty a good skater and he could use her as an example that older people (she was 53 at the time) could skate as well as the young. Betty must have believed the instructor because she attempted to dance as soon as she was on the ice. But instead of graceful turns and spins, she fell and broke her wrist.

Betty corresponded with Ruth Moffett while in Fairbanks. In May, 1941, Ruth wrote in response to a letter from Betty: *“Your sweet and artistic letter brought great joy to my heart, and I have shared it with many of the friends. Your description of Alaska, your airplane trip, the mountains, the sunsets and all were so vivid it brought us all very close to you. Many times my thoughts have been with you and my prayers have ascended on your behalf, and how I have longed to be with you and help you establish a firm and steadfast community in that city, but I am a leaf blown by the will of God... As for my work since last Convention: I have given 302 lectures in 30 cities and 10 states; gave 12 radio broadcasts and addressed 10 non-Bahá’i organizations where the message had never before been given. Thirteen new classes and groups were established where there were none before, and 25 new souls from these groups have already become confirmed...”*<sup>11</sup> All of these successes must have made Betty anxious about her own efforts.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Moffett Papers, May 6, 1941, National Baha’i Archives, United States.

## Anchorage

On March 23, 1941, Betty returned to Anchorage where she spent the next 18½ years. At the time of her arrival, Anchorage was little more than half the size of Juneau, but with the invasion of the Aleutian Islands by the Japanese, the city acquired a strategic importance and grew rapidly.

With Honor Kempton, Janet Whitenack and Vern Stout (who later married Janet), Joy Allen, and Myrtle Dodge, Betty actively taught the Faith in the area with the goal of forming a Spiritual Assembly. With housing tight because of the war, Betty was very lucky to be asked to be the hostess at the Business and Professional Women’s Club. The club had an apartment with cooking facilities and a room for her firesides.

With the addition of a few local believers, the Alaskan Bahá’i community began teaching with an abundance of enthusiasm. They were united and active.

Betty’s Alaskan years were very busy. Besides the Business and Professional Women’s Club, she was also involved with the Writer’s Club, the Women’s Club and others. She also helped form a United Nations Association and, as one of its officers, would have Bahá’is talk at the group’s banquets. In a letter to Janet Whitenack, Betty said: *“Over the week I would supply my icebox with enough food to last a week, so it was very easy to carry on. There was never a dull moment. I enjoyed it all and when Mr. Leroy (Loas) who led my adventure to*



Betty in Anchorage  
Photo courtesy of the NSA of Alaska

*Alaska, and other friends would write to me and sympathize about living in this very cold Alaska, I would laugh to myself, because I was having such a good time.”*

Betty had a waffle breakfast on Sunday mornings at which she would offer the message of Bahá'u'lláh. To this she invited friends and contacts, seldom having trouble filling her small apartment. To her, the breakfasts were, *“perhaps my most rewarding activity Bahá'i-wise...Started about 11 AM and the people stayed all afternoon usually and sometimes all day. They were well attended and the results were also good... Often later when attending Chicago*

*Conventions or conferences here and there someone would rush up to me saying, ‘Do you remember me? I used to come to your waffle breakfasts – I’m a Bahá’i now.’ What a glorious feeling!!!”* Along with the breakfasts and all her club activity, Betty also had a regular weekly fireside and dinners for newcomers.

There were a few problems, however. Like in Juneau, the clergy in Anchorage spread rumors about the Bahá'ís. In a letter to Jenabe Caldwell, a future Knight of Bahá'u'lláh to the Aleutian Islands, Betty wrote, *“we are very active but the results are not forthcoming like they should be. We have been so publicized by the clergy in Anchorage, people sometimes act like they are afraid of us...”*

During the years of the second world war, Betty worked with the USO as a hostess for the dances, parties and outings the group had for soldiers stationed nearby. She also sponsored her own dances for the soldiers and the single women who worked in the many government agencies. Betty made a little money from her dances and this she contributed to the building of the House of Worship in Wilmette, Illinois (near Chicago).

Betty had another other-worldly event at this time. A Mrs. Showalter had been attending her firesides. One morning, a friend agitatedly knocked on her door and said: *“Betty, have you listened to the radio? Mrs. Showalter was*

killed last night on her way home from the theater.” Betty turned on the radio and heard that Mrs. Showalter had taken a shortcut through a field on her way home and had been attacked and killed. Later, when the friend had gone, Betty sensed someone in the room. The unseen person said: “Betty, he attacked me and killed me! What shall I do? What should I do. Where can I go? Please, please help me!” In reply, Betty told her to “Find ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, find ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” and a second later she was gone.

As a writer, she provided a valuable service to the Alaskan Bahá’í community by writing up a history of the Faith in the Far North.

## A Trip to Nome

During the summer of 1943, Betty made a trip to see Nome. Her letter to Ruth Moffett a few months later describes her adventure in picturesque detail<sup>12</sup>: “Enjoyed immensely the flight to Nome. As far as McGrath, while going through ‘Rainy Pass’...we flew very low, sometimes you felt the wings might crash into the sides of the mountains... During this particular part of the trip we encountered showers galore. Sometimes on both sides of us while we would be skimming along in sunshine. This created an interesting phenomena (sic). All sorts of splotches of rainbows, sometimes nestling on a mountain slope. When this occurs they are very wide, and color the entire side of the mountain...At other times the rainbow makes a complete circle — which is rather rare but displayed itself

<sup>12</sup> Ruth Moffett Papers, Dec. 7, 1943, National Bahá’í Archives, United States.

for our particular benefit.

“All this intrigued me no end — fleecy white clouds with the blue sky peeping through, showers and rainbow colors playing all sorts of antics around us, kept my head bobbing constantly from one side to the other in the plane. It evidently had a similar effect on my traveling companion. He became quite romantic. It was not a large plane that we were in and we carried so much freight so he and I — the only passengers — were strapped together in the back seat more or less in the tail of the plane. Since I was not especially attracted to him...it was quite amusing. He took my name and address and felt sure that destiny had brought us together, but I have not seen him since...

“After leaving McGrath, a small interior town on the Kuskokwim River, we climbed straight up, far above the tops of the clouds and stayed there all the way into Nome...Never, never, I do not believe, could anyone anywhere find so many winding rivers and lakes as you see from the plane...When you are up as high as we were the rivers appear very narrow streams and whitish from the silt they carry down from the mountains and you could almost imagine a million snakes coiling below you...The lakes, on the other hand, snuggle everywhere and are fed from the rains and are as blue as the sky..

“In Nome I was fortunate to get into the leading hotel after sleeping with the young lady at our office for a couple of nights. A young woman...was getting married to a young captain who she had known for TWO very long weeks — so I got her room, we became acquainted and she invited me to the wedding reception and such a reception it was! I met all the

*leading socialites of the town and most or all of the officers of the army. By midnight nearly everyone was in high spirits... The reception was the talk of the town for the next few days. My escort was a Russian Major – he could not speak very good English but with the motion of his hands, the expression of his eyes and monosyllables we made ourselves understood. Some of the Cossacks are too good looking for their own good. One nice thing was that he did not care for American liquors and in the absence of Vodka, he did not over-indulge and so I had someone to steer me through the crowd and a good strong arm to cling to for which I was more grateful.*

*“Nome was somewhat larger than I had anticipated and with the army included it was rather a buzzing lively place... The reindeer abides mainly in the vicinity of Nome and every restaurant menu has its reindeer meat prepared in various ways, stews, steaks, roast, etc. It is good too. One sees very few, if any, fresh salads on the menus in Nome. During the summer when the boats come in the stores have fresh fruits and vegetables... Strange as it may seem, and unlike any other parts of Alaska where I have visited, there are no mountains even anywhere near Nome. It is on the level, without any trees and very little vegetation, although they do have small gardens during the short summers.*

*“Upon returning from Nome to Fairbanks, flying sometimes very high and again unusually low, was one big panorama of ever-shifting scenery. Once in a while, while going low, you spot a bear, or a herd of caribou or moose.”*

## Alaska’s First Local Spiritual Assembly

On September 8, 1943, the nine Anchorage Bahá’is formed the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Alaska. Three months later, Betty described how it happened in a long letter to Ruth Moffett<sup>13</sup>: *“By this time you doubtless know that we have a Spiritual Assembly in Anchorage. It was almost a miracle the way it came about. Last spring Myrtle Dodge, a Bahá’í from the states who has been here over two years, felt she must return...that left only Honor Kempton, Mina Lundquist, a new Bahá’í and myself. It seemed utterly hopeless and there was nothing to do but leave it in God’s hands. Even before Myrtle left things began to happen. Two young soldiers declared themselves – one of these, however, was transferred to Seward...from sunny California came Francis Wells... sent by the teaching committee...from far away New York Verne Stout answered the call and joined us. I gave the message to Florence Green who had no scruples... in accepting any of it. One day in her office she was required to give her church affiliation...said she was not a protestor so did not consider herself a Protestant, neither was she a Catholic, she kept telling the woman...that she had no religion and to leave that space blank. The woman... asked about Bahá’í, ‘you sit and read the literature all day...She answered ‘Why didn’t I think I am a Bahá’í and she lost no time in telling us so.*

*“Another young woman came in*

<sup>13</sup> Ruth Moffett Papers, Dec. 7, 1943, National Bahá’í Archives, United States.

*about the same time  
– Ethel Ross Oliver...  
She was recently married to Simeon Oliver...  
He was in the army here, is part Eskimo...  
is a concert pianist,  
composer of music and writer. Ethel is a school teacher.*

*“...After Ethel and Florence came in we were still only seven since Ethel could not be on the Assembly [she lived outside Anchorage]. And so Janet Whitenack gave up her teaching work in Tuluk-*

*sak and came to Anchorage. She came into the Cause not so very long after Honor had settled in Anchorage. Strange how it all came about. Janet came here from New York and had decided to put up a book shop. Honor had already ordered books, felt that there was not enough business for two people and so she called on Janet to talk it over and through it all Janet became a Bahá'í, went to Fairbanks where she opened up a book shop and started teaching on her own.... Two years after she opened her book shop she took a notion to sell it and went to Tuluk-  
sac to teach school, mainly with the intention of taking the message there.*

*We still were only eight with Janet. Out of a clear sky came a letter from Mrs. Frank (Lorraine) Been, wife of the superintendent of McKinley Park, stating she wanted to be one of us and expected to come and make her home in Anchorage...*



The Local Spiritual Assembly of Anchorage, Sept. 8, 1943  
Back Row: Mina Lundquist, Honor Kempton, Florence Green  
Middle Row: Frances Wells, Janet Whitenack, Loraine Been  
Front Row: Terrell Frazier, Betty Becker, Verne Stout  
Photo courtesy of the NSA of Alaska

*And so on September 8, 1943 by joint declaration we formed the first Spiritual Assembly of Anchorage. We donned our nicest formals and made a very special occasion out of what we considered the greatest event in the history of Alaska. Outside it was raining and cold but inside all was warm and cozy while we made our contribution to the seven year plan. We were all very appreciative because it has been up-hill work. The teaching committee felt that only nine members in Anchorage was rather skating on thin ice and so sent Dagmar Dole to us.”*

Betty was elected Recording Secretary of this Mother Assembly and served on the Assembly for 16 years until her departure to pioneer to Chile in 1959.

In 1948, Betty was elected as the Alaskan delegate to the Bahá'í



The new Local Spiritual Assembly of Anchorage and community  
 Back Row: Mina Lundquist, Janet Whitenack, Florence Green, Terrell Frazier, Betty Becker  
 Middle Row: Frances Wells, Loraine Been  
 Front Row: Honor Kempton, Verne Stout, Ethel Ross Oliver, Dagmar Dole  
 Photo courtesy of the NSA of Alaska

Convention. She was again elected the delegate for the 1953 Jubilee Convention.

Pat and Georgine Moul, Bahá'ís from America, moved into the community in 1953 and Betty called them wonderful assets in the teaching work. With so many people both coming into the community and also leaving, Betty wrote to Ruth Moffett that “*You see people here come and go so fast and so many have moved outside the city limits of Anchorage that we were getting quite low in numbers in Anchorage proper, so the Moul’s are needed very*

*much.*”<sup>14</sup> Within a few months, however, the Moul’s moved to Ketchikan.

In one letter to Ruth Moffett, Betty complained about the lack of teaching success in Anchorage<sup>15</sup>: “*Ruthie, someone is going to have to pray for me – things seem to be at more or less of a stand-still with me. True I’m active in all Bahá’í affairs and other activities for making contacts but I’m not getting anywhere in my teaching work. When I do get people to teach they either leave Anchorage or are*

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Moffett Papers, Nov. 17, 1953, National Bahá’í Archives, United States.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Moffett Papers, Nov. 17, 1953, National Bahá’í Archives, United States.

*so difficult it seems almost overwhelming. Sometimes it's a good thing one has a sense of humor left. Not too long ago an elderly couple sought us out; then later she saw my ad for my fireside in the paper and called me. She's Rosicrucian and it was most difficult to keep from talking reincarnation all the time. Finally she told me that if I would tell her that Bahá'u'lláh's station was not divine – not equal with Jesus – she and her husband*

selected the initial site for the first Alaskan Hazíratu'l-Quds of Anchorage in 1955. Betty wrote an article on the dedication of the site for the Bahá'í World. The site, at 820 8th Ave. in downtown Anchorage, was damaged during the great Alaskan earthquake of 1964 and was later sold to help purchase the present site along the Seward Highway, south of the city proper.



Photo courtesy of the NSA of Alaska

Betty met Jenabe Caldwell, who was an Auxiliary Board Member in Alaska, and the acquaintance was to have a significant affect on future events. In early 1956, Betty purchased her first 25 shares of stock in Jenabe's crab cannery on Unalaska Island, the Aleutian Development Company, Inc., for \$250. Ultimately, she purchased 154 shares in the company and the

*would study the teachings."*

Keeping sufficient numbers of Bahá'ís in Anchorage was just one of Betty's problems. Being on the Local Spiritual Assembly, she was also responsible for filling pioneering goals. Before Ridván 1954, she had been involved with settling the Moulds in Ketchikan, Jane Gardner in Valdez and Dorothy and Edgar Russell, long time Anchorage Bahá'ís, in Seward. The goals for the next year included Nome, Kotzebue or Pt. Barrow.

sale of that stock would later allow the struggling community in Punta Arenas, Chile, make a down payment on a center for that city.

In April, 1957, Betty was one of the nine delegates to the first National Convention which elected the first National Spiritual Assembly of Alaska. Two years later, on April 25, 1959, she was one of the Readers at the dedication of the Alaska Temple Site during the Third Annual Convention.

Betty was on the committee that



## PIONEERING TO CHILE

After the years in Alaska, Betty began to feel restless. In January, 1947, she wrote to the Guardian and offered her services as a pioneer to Europe for the Seven-year Plan. She wrote: *“Since Europe has now been added to the American conquest under the new 7-year plan, this letter is written particularly to volunteer my services where they are most needed and where I can be most useful. I speak a smattering of German and feel it should not be so very difficult to learn the Swedish or Norwegian languages...”* Rúhiyyih Khánum, writing for Shoghi Effendi, said that *“He very much appreciates your desire to once again answer the call for pioneers and go to Europe, and in principle he approves of your doing so. However, Miss Kempton has already left Alaska, and ... he is very concerned lest the work in Alaska suffer and the number of resident believers in Anchorage fall to below assembly status. Alaska is one of the prizes of the first seven year plan, and must be guarded at all costs.”* The Guardian added: *“I deeply appreciate the spirit that so powerfully animates you in the service of our beloved Faith. You are a great asset to the Cause you serve so devotedly. I will pray for the extension & consolidation of your services from the depths of my heart. Persevere in your historic task. Rest assured and be happy.”*<sup>16</sup>

By 1959, Betty decided that she needed a change from Anchorage. She felt that homefront pioneering in Alaska

<sup>16</sup> High Endeavours, Letter from Shoghi Effendi, March 15, 1947, p49

was more than she could handle: *“I didn't feel quite up to the task of going farther north in Alaska alone because of the cold and the loneliness and the hardships involved. I didn't feel that I could take it.”* But then she saw an article in the May, 1959 issue of the American Bahá'í News about pioneering under the sponsorship of Persian believers. So, on June 22, she wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States asking for information on pioneering under the Ten Year Crusade. Horace Holley, then secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, wrote her saying that she was under the jurisdiction of the Alaska National Spiritual Assembly and would need their permission to pioneer through the United States.

Evelyn Huffman wrote on behalf of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Alaska to Mr. Holley giving its permission for Betty to pioneer under the auspices of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States:<sup>17</sup> *“We are happy to say that at this time, with the influx of a number of believers ...into Anchorage, that community seems to be on quite a firm footing.*

*“While we do not encourage Alaskans to leave since we ourselves have set goals for the remainder of the Crusade which we are most anxious to accomplish in order to achieve total victory of the Six Year Subsidiary Plan given us by our Guardian, we do feel that with her many years of service in Alaska, Miss Becker is*

<sup>17</sup> Letter from NSA Alaska to NSA United States, June 29, 1959, National Bahá'í Archives, United States.

*entitled to and deserving of any change she is desirous of making. She has been a most staunch and dedicated champion of the Faith, always placing the Faith above all other considerations. She has served in many capacities and is well known and loved in many circles both inside and outside of the Faith.”*

By July 2, 1959, Mr. Holley had received both the permission from the Alaska National Spiritual Assembly and the completed application form from Betty and had passed them on to the Western Hemisphere Teaching Committee that was in charge of pioneering.

Betty was truly eager to serve Bahá'u'lláh and to spread the Bahá'í Faith throughout the world, but she was evidently a little worried about the acceptance of a 72 year-old woman by the Western Hemisphere Teaching Committee as a potential pioneer to a foreign land. In her pioneering application, she listed her birth date as being “12/25/06.” This mysterious loss of 19 years gave her an apparent age of only 53. In late July, when Betty had two lesions removed from her forehead, the hospital's form, which was also sent to the committee, listed her age as 53.

In her application for pioneering, Betty noted that she would like to go to a larger city in either Africa or South America. But she did have her worries – she requested that, “*Should you send me to either South America, or Africa, where a new language has to be learned, could I perhaps go to some place*

*where there is an English-speaking Bahá'í and get oriented before I go to my post alone?”*<sup>18</sup> And she also said that she would need full aid since her savings were meager and would be needed for dental and physical checkups.

Mr. Holley passed Betty's letter and application to Katherine McLaughlin of the Western Hemisphere Teaching Committee (WHTC). Ms. McLaughlin's first letter to Betty cheered her great spirit: “*We are thrilled to know that you have been released by your National Assembly in order to pioneer in South America, where so many pioneers are needed in order to build every required local assembly by Ridván 1960.*” The letter went on to suggest several possible pioneering posts. Since Betty spoke some German, the committee suggested Encarnación, Paraguay; Valdivia, Chile; and Minas, Uruguay. Encarnación was described as, “*a small, backward, isolated city on the border with Argentina... You would have an English-speaking Bahá'í who has long experience in South America, Miss Eve Nicklin.*” Of Valdivia, Ms. McLaughlin's letter said: “*We are not stressing this goal as much because at the moment it is more important to have pioneers in Paraguay than Chile.*”

The suggestions of the committee obviously did not thrill Betty. Of Encarnación, she wrote: “*I feel that coming from the north, it would probably be too hot. I have found that when I visit... Oklahoma the heat makes me puff up like a balloon...*” She also worried

<sup>18</sup> Letter to Horace Holley, Sec. NSA of the United States, June 29, 1959, National Bahá'í Archives, United States.



Valdivia and the Río Calle Calle

that Valdivia would be too small and limited for a single woman. The WHTC put Betty in direct contact with the National Spiritual Assembly of Brazil, Peru, Columbia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. This body initially suggested Pereira, Colombia where an old friend of hers, Helen Brown, was also going to pioneer, but on August 15, the National Assembly changed that goal to Manizales, Colombia. In order to obtain her visa for Colombia, she was told to state that her reason for wanting to go there was to join a friend who lived there, Mrs. Mary Johnson (who was another American pioneer).

Betty immediately sent off a letter to Mary Johnson filled with questions. What kind of work was available, what furniture should she bring, any special clothing, where to stay, and were the people easy to get acquainted with. She also noted that she hoped to be on her way by the first of October.

On August 28, 1959, the WHTC wrote Betty and asked whether, *“you would be agreeable to changing your post from Colombia to Chile. We have had*

*a cable from the Regional Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, and an urgent letter from the Committee for the Entrance of Pioneers to that area, asking for your services in Valdivia, Chile.”* All these changes kept Betty jumping for on August 31, Betty responded: *“My plans were practically formulated and I was going to write you and tell you about them when*

*your letter...was received...with still another surprise...*

*“Yes, I am willing to change to Valdivia but am a little concerned as to the possibilities of finding work there. Things have practically shaped themselves for me rather than for me to direct them. In a way that’s good then I know all is well.”*

## Arrival In Valdivia

The Alaska Bahá’í community gave Betty a grand farewell party on October 1, 1959, to send her on her way. After the party, she left Alaska and traveled to Santiago, Chile, with a short stop in Oklahoma to visit her relatives. While in the Oklahoma City airport with her brother, Betty’s ticket agent turned out to be from Valdivia, Chile. Her brother was dumbfounded.

On her flight from the United States to Chile, Betty saw, *“one of the most gorgeous colorful sights one could expect to see. We were flying between two layers of clouds. It was sunset, ahead of us it was*



*raining...here and there, and a rainbow spread above and below us in very colorful array, mingled with the most vivid sunset one could ever expect to see. The whole heavens, above and below, seemed to be on fire, mingled with the colors of the rainbow.”*

To help Betty with her arrival in Chile, the WHTC had written to Dr. Alexander Reid in Chile, asking him to assist her during her first days. When she arrived at the Santiago airport on October 8, Dr. Reid was there to help her through Chilean Customs, which proved to be no trouble at all.

The Bahá'ís of Santiago asked Betty to stay for a while and she ended up visiting the area for two weeks. Lina Smithson was a great help to Betty while she was there. Betty was given a reception at the Center. Counsellor Elsie Cascara also arrived and they were kept quite busy. *“They hovered over my Alaskan slides at some length to see if I might have any hidden treasures...Have shown them several times...the last in a larger hall and people crowded over each other...I asked them what part of Alaska they were most interested in and they shouted almost with one accord ‘all of it.’ I asked them how late they wanted to stay – again with one vote ‘all night.’ However, the janitor saved the day about midnight, stating he had to lock up.”* She also visited and thoroughly enjoyed Viña del Mar, the coastal playground for the people of Santiago.

Betty finally reached her new pioneering post on October 23. Valdivia at that time was a German-accented city of about 150,000 people that formed a triangle bounded on two sides by the Río Calle Calle.

Enrique Aguirre, another pioneer from the United States, met her at the airport and took her to the Palace Hotel where Elsie Cascara joined her for a few days. Betty really enjoyed the beautiful

river that flowed through Valdivia. The Costanera was a popular walkway along the river and Enrique “*and an English-speaking professor from Tennessee, both tall and good looking, see to it that I get plenty of exercise.*”

From her room in the Palace Hotel, Betty could see Valdivia’s central plaza and hear the concerts from its bandstand. The diversity and abundance of the flowers in Valdivia thoroughly delighted Betty. She did note that every sunny morning she would go to the plaza to get warm because “*there is no heat in the houses and hotels and one gets cold,*” even in the spring. In one letter, she stated, “*Spring in Valdivia is something. I have been colder here than I ever was in Alaska.*”

The food in Chile surprised Betty, not being spicy as it commonly was in Mexico. “*Generally they serve dinner at night at 9 o’clock and in five courses. Soup or salad, followed by a fish or a mixed dish, then steak, chicken or other meat followed by dessert and you finish with a demitasse of strong coffee or tea. All this you take to bed with you so use your imagination.*”

Betty was highly impressed with Enrique: “*Enrique is a dynamo. He never stops...*” “*...he never stops a moment calling on and making individual contacts.*” Enrique had lived in the United States and spoke English quite well. His sense of humor must have been strong because once, when called back to the United States because of his father’s illness, he said to his father, “*Why didn’t you kick de bucket? Here you are taking up a whole week of my precious time when I have so much to do. Why don’t*

*you make your mind what do do.*” His father evidently laughed himself back to health.

Enrique was giving three radio talks each week on a program called “La Voz Bahá’í” (The Bahá’í Voice), one at each of the local stations. He had set up talks for Betty at two of the radio stations but, since they wanted the talks to be in German, Betty had to postpone them until she could polish up her speech in that language. Betty began taking classes in German and was later able to begin a weekly radio program in German. She developed many contacts through the program, but complained that though she, “*found the people very friendly...there seemingly was not the slightest intention on their part of studying or even becoming interested in the teachings.*”

Betty quickly learned that customs were different in Chile. “*When I first came to Chile, while in Valdivia, I worked with another pioneer, a Chilean. Every time we would call on people, he would tell me before he knocked on the door, ‘Please remember to kiss and embrace them when I introduce you.’*”

Betty decided that because the community needed her so much for teaching the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in Valdivia, she shouldn’t look too diligently for a job. The WHTC, however, strongly encouraged her to find some sort of work because of the financial drain on their funds and because of the Bahá’í law to work. The National Spiritual Assembly of the United States later stated that pioneers should not worry about work but should concentrate on their teaching.

## A Valdivia Center

One of Betty's first recommendations to WHTC was that Valdivia desperately needed a center. With Enrique's radio programs and articles in the newspapers, she thought that the community needed a center for all the people who could be interested in the Faith. Both she and Enrique had nowhere to offer hospitality to contacts since each had nothing more than a small hotel room. To teach they had to visit their contacts in their homes or places of business. Also, since social custom dictated that a person should reciprocate after being invited to another's home, it was quite embarrassing to her and Enrique to be unable to do so.

The teaching activity in Valdivia concerned Betty because the goal of the whole effort was the election of a Local Spiritual Assembly the following Ridván, which was less than four months away. She requested the funds for a center from the WHTC, but they replied that funds for a Center had to come from the Regional Assembly that covered Chile. They did increase her monthly allotment from \$100/month to \$125/month and added \$150 from which she could furnish an apartment when she found one. Betty apologetically wrote back to the WHTC on December 22 that she was *"so sorry I caused you so much trouble about the furniture – I did not mean for the committee to maintain a center. That I considered my problem. Sometimes I get quite desperate to get something accomplished – neither did I know the funds were so limited."*

*"Shall keep you posted," she said, "we are busy watering the seeds."*

During 1959, Hand of the Cause Dr. Herman Grossmann and his wife moved to Valdivia to aid in the formation of its Local Spiritual Assembly. Chile needed to form eight Local Spiritual Assemblies by Ridván of 1960 in order to elect its first National Spiritual Assembly.<sup>19</sup>

As the end of December, 1959, approached, two new pioneers were on their way to Valdivia. One was Otilie Rhein, a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh who had pioneered in Africa, and the other was Miss Marilyn Bierman from Santa Fe, New Mexico. Ms. Rhein arrived in Valdivia on December 31.

On January 1, 1960, Betty wrote an enthusiastic letter to the WHTC reporting *"good NEWS!"* The Valdivia Bahá'ís had a center. Enrique lived in the Hotel Splendid which the owner planned to close for the summer. When Betty met the owner on the street one day, the owner asked why the Bahá'ís didn't take over the hotel for the summer. So an arrangement was made. The hotel was at Libertad 9, next to the Rio Calle Calle and the heart of Valdivia.

To Betty, the Center was a dream fulfilled. In a letter to Athos Costas, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay, she said, *"And now, with a Center...we will have firesides & study groups and will more readily be able to ascertain how much interest is displayed...Also from our public meetings we will learn the results of Enrique's broad-*

<sup>19</sup> Aparicio, Sergio, personal communication, 2009



Manuel Salvo

*casts since last April.”*

By late January, there were five pioneers in Valdivia, Enrique Aguirre, Betty Becker, Otilie Rhein, the Grossmanns, with the prospect of Marilyn Bierman and an additional Persian couple also moving there. Manuel Salvo, who became a Bahá'í in 1957, and Elena Latorre were also in the city. Then, on January 30, Betty ecstatically wrote the WHTC saying, “*It is an accomplished Goal! On the evening of January 29 five Valdivians became Bahá'ís...A public reception was held and the different new Bahá'ís were called on to respond they made stirring & heart-felt remarks.*” The first Valdivians to respond to the call of Bahá'u'lláh were Maria de Jaramilla, Clarita de Mancada, Laura de Trench, Rolando Schultz, and Gastón Eduardo Agüero.

The inspired teaching efforts of Enrique and Betty had paid off and there were enough Bahá'ís in Valdivia to form a Local Spiritual Assembly.

## Problems with a Visa

In early March of 1960, Betty received a letter from National Spiritual Assembly member Athos Costas: “*The National Spiritual Assembly is filled with gratitude and joy because of the fulfillment of the goal in Valdivia, and is very appreciative of your devoted work in that city. We are so happy to say that all our goals have been assured. However, there are some weak Local Assemblies in Chile needing urgent help in order not to lose status. We have asked Miss Otilie Rhein to transfer her residence to Osorno; the other one weak Local Assembly in Chile is Punta Arenas.*”

“*In considering this serious situation it was evident for the National Assembly that you are the better qualified for Punta Arenas, to raise up the spirit of the friends and to attract new souls to our beloved Faith.*”

“*Valdivia will not be endangered with your going. The dear Hand of the Cause, Dr. Grossman, and his wife, Anna Grossman, have...decided to fix their residence in Valdivia.*”

So, Betty's pioneering post was, once again, changed. At the same time, Otilie Rhein moved to Osorno to help that community.<sup>20</sup>

But first Betty had to take care of a visa problem. The Chilean Consulate in San Francisco had written to her in Alaska that the easiest course was to go to Chile as a tourist and later acquire her resident visa. Betty had tried to find out the best way to acquire her

<sup>20</sup> Aparicio, Sergio, personal communication, 2009



A Cordillera road

resident visa while she was in Valdivia and the man in charge of visas told her she should wait for the three months of her tourist visa to expire then renew it for a second three months. After this, he said, she should have little difficulty getting a resident visa.

Shortly after her arrival in Valdivia, Betty applied for the extension of her tourist visa. She and Enrique were sent from office to office, but finally managed to obtain the extension. But in early April, her extension was up and she had to leave Chile to apply for her resident visa. The whole process became very confusing to her and ended up taking considerable time.

First, Betty had to leave Chile because of the expiration of her tourist visa. Since the nearest foreign city from which she could apply for a resident visa was Bariloche, Argentina, she decided to go there. Initially, she was told that the trip to Bariloche would take only an hour so she was surprised to find herself on a 36-hour adventure. Her journey began with a train ride to Osorno with

Dr. and Mrs. Grossman. From there, she switched to a bus, then to a boat, back to a bus, and to another boat until she was thoroughly befuddled.

The adventures of the trip to Bariloche began in a Volkswagen bus in the Andes Mountains. It had rained heavily during the night and a

flood had washed away a bridge near Petrohué. To safely cross the washed-out road, she climbed into a large truck. *“Some of the men waded ahead of us to see if it was safe to cross. After crossing the meandering, churning river I gave a big sigh of relief, thinking ‘That’s over’...*

*“But I had a surprise in store for me. There were three or four more...Just when I again started to relax we came upon a large bus from Puerto Montt which was stuck. After pulling this out and which now followed us we arrived at another washed out bridge. This was the worst of all. There was a very black waterfall from way up high and a very large truck stuck in the middle of the road. It had sunk deeply into the sand. Again we came to the rescue. Some of the passengers immediately waded across the river to the other side where a truck was waiting to pick them up and take them to the boat. I tried a time or two to do likewise but the men told me to stay in the bus.*

*“I was getting very impatient with all this delay. I did not want to miss the boat, all I wanted was my visa and go*



to Punta Arenas by the date I should be there. While thus musing, I heard something snap and someone in the bus shouted – ‘We’ll all be drowned.’...Everyone started to scramble for the door. When I got there the water was well over my boot tops and rising very rapidly, so I started back. Our driver came along at that very moment and shouted ‘No, no, no,’ took me by the hand and I did not know I could run so fast. As soon as we outran the deep water I looked back and what a sight. Very dirty water all over, tannish-black pouring down in a wide waterfall, huge and horrible. We started running again and came to an old wooden shack, quite a few others had reached it before me. They had built a fire inside and were trying to dry out their boots and clothes...One Chilean, very kindly found me a seat, knelt down and took off my boots and shoes, emptied the water from them, gave me some rags he found in the shack to dry myself with, talking all the time he was doing this, ‘Who would think that a Chilean would be privileged to help an American lady in distress’...He was very gallant, making long wide motions with his arms while he talked until he had everyone laughing.

“What happened, a second water fall formed while we were trying to pull out the truck in the river almost directly over the truck...doubtless the movement of this truck caused a vacuum whenever they tugged on it, loosened the earth and created a mountain slide, unleashing at the same time a lake or reservoir high up in the mountain which flooded down in one big swoop, lasting a half an hour or so. Doubtless that truck will be there through countless ages as quite a tall mountain of debris formed over it from the sand, dirt,

water debris...When the water had run off...one of the men helped me across. By now this was quite an ordeal. The water was now much higher than at first and I was splashing wet, my coat soaked up an awful lot of sand and mud and wading was difficult. The water was well over my knees in most places and I had quite a sloppy ride on the boat that took us to our hotel that night...This incident of sharing a common danger made us all feel very close...and many friendships were formed.”

Having survived all the perils of her Andean crossing at the age of 73, Betty finally reached Bariloche on April 6 without her luggage. Betty really enjoyed Bariloche in spite of the interminable waiting for her visa and the anxiety of wanting to reach Punta Arenas in time for Ridván. She found a room in the Hotel Tres Reyes (Three Kings), each room with very interesting and elaborate decorations depicting the visit to the Christ Child by the three wise men. “The management at the hotel...doubtless felt sorry for me because of my luggage and were especially kind, they told me I was very brave and gave me much special attention, including the owner – now and then he would send tea or a coke to me in the big lounge, until I felt like the queen of the Three Kings in my one and only suit...Nearly forgot, think I would have had two proposals if I had urged them on a bit, one a famous man in S.A. and the other a townsman in Bariloche...”

On April 7, the day after arriving in Bariloche, Betty visited the Chilean Consulate in her only clothes. In Valdivia, she had been told that obtaining a

visa would only take 24 hours. But, before she finally had her visa in hand, she would spend three weeks in Bariloche. Her great desire was to reach Punta Arenas by Ridván and wrote that, *“This delay has completely disrupted my plans, has caused me much mental anxiety, much expense, running into \$4-\$500 if my baggage cannot be found...”* She recovered her luggage but not until she returned to Valdivia.

There was much sending of cables by both Betty and the Chilean Consulate. None of Betty’s ever seemed to reach their destinations. One did reach the American Consul but their answer was returned to them marked “Undelivered.” Betty also worried that the Consulate didn’t accept that she was a Bahá’í so she wrote several letters asking different people for help. Finally, after the enforced three-week stay in Bariloche, her visa was granted and she was able to return to Valdivia.

## The Move to Punta Arenas

Betty returned to Valdivia about May 1, 1960, and, not having gotten a response to her wire to the National Spiritual Assembly sent from Bariloche, she again wired them asking whether she should still proceed to Punta Arenas. Not receiving an answer to the second wire, either, she decided to proceed with her plans to move to Punta Arenas. Her decision was hastened because the Bahá’ís had to leave their Center when its owner returned.

So, Betty began the 1,000-mile trip to her newest pioneering post, one so

dear to the heart of the Guardian, by first going to Santiago to visit friends. From Santiago she continued, reaching Punta Arenas on May 12.

Punta Arenas is, according to Chileans, the southern-most city in the world and is located on the mainland across from Tierra del Fuego. The first Local Spiritual Assembly had been formed in Punta Arenas in 1945 and Shoghi Effendi mentions the city many times in his correspondence.

Nine days after her departure from Valdivia, the great earthquake of 1960 destroyed much of the city and devastated the region. Betty worried about the Friends in her first Chilean home, but there were no communications with the beleaguered city. Then she finally received a letter from Manuel Salvo describing what had happened to the Bahá’ís in Valdivia. All survived but some lost their homes. Betty described what happened: *“The beautiful river that flowed through the center of town became a river of death and destruction... There were many summer resorts along the river up in the mountains. These were all tumbled into the river. A friend in Valdivia was visiting Niebla, a resort on the river, he became completely separated from everything, wandered about for three days until a boat picked him up. Most people were homeless, they built big fires, circled around them trying to keep warm, were chilled to the bones. This and the fear of more quakes kept their teeth chattering all the time. On top of all that almost continual torrential rains – not even a moment of tranquillity with inundation all around them, and the rifts in the earth made walking dangerous. When the trem-*



Punta Arenas and the Straits of Magellan

*ors came, as they did one after another, people would panic, running about wildly, losing all sense of direction.”* Whole towns, such as Corral, were destroyed and many killed, but all the Bahá'ís survived.

Betty arrived in Punta Arenas, the southernmost city in the world, on May 12 and was met at the airport by the local Bahá'ís. They found a room in the France Hotel for her that had the added advantage of being just across from where Dora Handler, another pioneer, lived. Betty and Dora quickly became good friends and began having tea together. The hotel, the only one available at the time, did not have any heat in the rooms. Betty and the other guests had to cluster around the large stove in the lobby to get warm. Later she was able to find two connecting rooms consisting of a living and a bedroom. The new rooms were in the front of the building and she could see both the Straits of Magellan and the mountains. She also enjoyed that she didn't have to cook or

clean but could use the kitchen when she wished to make tea for her friends.

## The Lost Cartons

As Betty tried to settle into her new home, she was struck by a great personal loss. She had shipped many

things from Alaska to Valdivia, Chile, but before she had received them, she had moved on to Punta Arenas. Before leaving Valdivia, she arranged to have her goods sent on to Punta Arenas.

Initially, Betty's possessions were shipped from Alaska to Seattle by Lyon Van & Storage. In Seattle, the Grace Line ship "Santa Juana," carried her things to Talcahuana, the shipping port for Santiago, arriving on April 10, 1960. The Grace Line then routed her boxes to Valdivia. From Talcahuana, the Chilean Line took her shipment and lost it for several months. Consequently, Betty spent much time visiting the Grace Line office in Punta Arenas trying to find the shipment.

When her possessions finally arrived in Punta Arenas on November 19, 1960, Betty was aghast to discover that a great portion of her things had been stolen in transit. Most of the boxes had holes in them – when the workmen delivered the first box to her room,

they left a trail of small items all up the stairs. She lost all of her bed clothes, most of her personal clothing, 1,000 color slides of different parts of the United States, her towels, linens, table cloths, 29 hats, many smaller personal items, and about half of her books. Her estimated loss was \$2,400.

She began contacting the various companies in December to file a claim, but each company blamed the other. The Grace Line said the items were packed by Lyon Van & Storage in crates that were too large and bulky, making them difficult to handle. It was also discovered that somehow 42 kilograms of the shipment was missing when it reached Chile.

In February, 1961, the Grace Line refused her claim, but on March 15, she submitted another. By late June, Betty was threatening legal action unless they acted on her claim. An Alaskan attorney wrote Betty and told her that Lyon Van & Storage was not represented in Alaska anymore and that local shipping companies had a liability limitation of 10¢ per pound.

The whole problem became very confusing as time wore on. Richard Groger, a Bahá'í in San Francisco, became involved with the case in late 1961 and he found that there was a discrepancy between what Betty said had been shipped (26 cartons) and what Lyon's records showed (16 cartons, 1 footlocker, 2 suitcases, 1 laundry bag, and 1 wardrobe trunk). He also noted that the total declared value made by the shipper (Betty) was only \$200 so her \$2,400 claim was a problem.

On March 15, 1962, the Grace Line

offered to pay Betty \$200 for her missing possessions. They stated that the freight forwarders who dispatched her cartons, had agreed to the \$200 valuation of each carton and that since two thirds of one carton was missing, technically, they were only liable for \$133. The Grace Line also blamed the Chilean Line for much of the loss. Mr. Groger urged Betty to accept the offer because there was little chance of succeeding with a claim against any of the other companies involved.

## Settling In

As Betty began settling into yet another new home and started establishing her firesides, she found that Punta Arenas, too, had its own problems. The city was strongly Catholic, like most of South America and an outsider talking about a new religion was quickly spotted. Betty started an English conversation class to meet people and to talk of the Faith. In fairly short order, she found her classes dwindling in size until she was forced to abandon them. From friends who at first attended the classes she discovered that the priests were telling the people not to go.

Not all the problems came from outside the Faith. Rarely did more than seven or eight of the Friends attend Feasts and other Bahá'í gatherings. She found the inactive Bahá'ís not interested in coming to meetings or meeting the new Bahá'ís, which also included a Persian couple, Mr. and Mrs. Goharriz, who arrived shortly before Betty. In a confidential report to the National Spir-

itual Assembly, she wrote, “*When I came here they were completely hopeless (the local Bahá’ís) as to making any kind of teaching effort. At our first general meeting they told...me that they had done all they could and were turning it over to us.*” She continued, however, saying that the local Bahá’ís were beginning to become increasingly active in teaching.

Her first years in Punta Arenas were difficult. She was unable to rent a room with heat and had great troubles finding people who were receptive to the Words of Bahá’u’lláh. “*The people,*” she said, “*will listen, pretend interest, and perhaps they are interested, but they have no intention of doing anything about it, even though you have made it very clear to them that it is everyone’s responsibility and privilege to do his part to bring to an end this age-long suffering and outmoded way of life. You invite them for tea and they are delighted, accept graciously and no one comes – one sits and waits all afternoon and not even an excuse is made then or later when you see them again.*”

Betty was frustrated but “*stayed on here (in Punta Arenas) because Punta Arenas needs to keep their goal filled as an Assembly in the Nine Year Plan.*” In one letter to Janet Stout in Alaska, Betty said that Punta Arenas was close to the heart of the Guardian, but that she wondered, “*what the Guardian liked about it. The winds they blow! blow! blow!! & the rains rain...But perhaps our precious far-seeing Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, had a vision of a Punta Arenas of the future.*”

One day while doing more governmental paperwork, she was having great difficulties understanding the clerk and being understood. Seeing a German

lady in the room, Betty asked for her aid. Soon they become good friends and the lady invited Betty to join the German Club. She gave many of the club members Bahá’í books, but none accepted the Faith.

## Covenant Breakers

On November 27, 1960, Betty wrote the National Spiritual Assembly that a grave trial had come to afflict the Punta Arenas community. Mason Remey, a Hand of the Cause of God, had broken with the Bahá’í world following the death of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, saying that he was the new Guardian of the Faith. A Punta Arenas Bahá’í, absent for a time, returned to the city as a follower of Mason Remey. In September, 1961, Artemus Lamb, one of the original founders of the Local Spiritual Assembly in 1945, wrote Betty that a covenant breaker could be coming to Punta Arenas and to take special precautions against association with him. By August of 1962, the covenant breaker’s wife and an inactive Bahá’í joined him as covenant breakers and caused untold anguish in the community. One woman expelled from the Faith by association with the known covenant breaker began demanding that she be reinstated. If not, she threatened to publish purportedly damaging facts about the other Bahá’ís in the community. She also threatened legal action and to have a Bahá’í radio program cancelled.

Hand of the Cause Mr. Faizí came to Punta Arenas in October, 1962, ini-

tially for just a few days, to deal with the problem. He ended up staying forty-five days, not just to work with the problem of the covenant breakers, but also to deepen the local believers. He had hoped to bring the errant souls back to the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, but was completely unable to do so. Just after Mr. Faizí departed, Auxiliary Board member Khamseh arrived.

## A Great New Friend

In early 1961, Betty received a letter from another pioneer who lived on Margarita Island, Venezuela. The letter was sparked by a visit made by Hand of the Cause Dr. Grossmann who had spoken about the isolation and difficulties of pioneers in Punta Arenas. Dr. Grossmann urged the pioneers in Venezuela to write to and visit those in Punta Arenas. The Margarita Island pioneer, Katharine Meyer, who was also a Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, eagerly accepted the suggestion and a long and deep friendship developed between her and Betty.

Katharine became a Bahá'í in Washington, D.C., in 1945, a few years after Betty found the Faith. Like Betty, she was set afire by her new faith and two years later rose to a call from Shoghi Effendi about the need for pioneers in Latin America. She settled in Venezuela and taught the Faith there and in other countries. In 1953, Katharine was honored with the title of Knight of Bahá'u'lláh when she pioneered to the Venezuelan island of Margarita. At the International Convention in 1968, a comment from Rúhíyyih Khánum

about the teaching efforts among the Mapuche people in southern Chile, inspired her to move to Nueva Imperial in 1969<sup>21</sup>. The next year she was appointed an Auxiliary Board member. She passed away in Chile in 2006.<sup>22</sup>

In one letter, Katharine told Betty that she hoped to spend her 1961 Christmas vacation in Punta Arenas. Betty was ecstatic, writing back: "*It will be so joyous to have you with us – I'm famished for your 'heart full of love,' so do get busy arranging things & do write me for any other information you desire.*" To help prepare her for her visit, Betty described the weather in Punta Arenas: "*There is really no summer here...you need warm clothes at all times and the wind blows & blows.*" "*We're having summer – it does not sleet or snow – but the wind bloweth where it willeth – it is not a respecter of seasons, and it overturned an auto and killed the person in it, also caused much other damage.*"

To Betty's crushing disappointment, Katharine was not able to reach Punta Arenas that year. Katharine did try but after flying to Santiago, she found that she was completely unable to get a seat on the plane to Punta Arenas.

One of the first subjects Betty broached to Katharine, in May 1962, was about the lack of success in teaching the Bahá'í Faith. She told of her "*useless feeling*" and the difficulties with teaching because of the Covenant breakers.

Katharine wrote back: "*Dear, I know just how you feel, only more so. I've been pioneering on the Island of Margarita for*

<sup>21</sup> Aparicio, Sergio, personal communication, 2009

<sup>22</sup> The Bahá'í World 2005–2006, p. 244



Katherine Meyer, Athos Costas and Eduardo Roe, 1976  
Photo by Rob and Paula Siegel

*“Elena... the only other Bahá’í here so far... didn’t become a Bahá’í till November of 1961. Before that it was pretty rugged – no one showed the least bit of interest and many showed fear when I tried to tell them a little about the Faith... I remember when in*

*eight and a half years (since 1953). You shouldn’t get too much of a ‘useless feeling’ yet as you have been in Punta Arenas only two years.*

*“The truth is, if we could only realize it, that a pioneer is anything but useless – his eager hopes and efforts, his prayers and every step he takes, big or little, to promote the Faith, you might say just the fact of his being there is of utmost importance. About 1955 and 1956, seemingly getting nowhere no matter what I tried, I began to get really desperate and I suppose this anxiety was only too evident in a letter I wrote to Rúhíyyih Khánúm. In her answer some time later she said ‘...I don’t think the pioneers have any perspective on their own work. I know not only you but many others feel they are just wasting their time sitting in some place the other end of nowhere and getting no results. But this is not the way the Guardian sees it. ...In another paragraph she mentioned that it took Agnes Alexander about forty-five years to see any real results in Japan.*

*Haifa asking the Guardian if opening the Island of Margarita to the Faith meant getting an Assembly together in the ten years of the Crusade. He looked at me gravely and said, ‘If you get only one person, the island is opened to the Faith.’”*

## The London Conference

At the end of November, 1962, Betty made reservations to attend the Bahá’í World Congress in London, England. She arrived in London about a week before the Congress, which began on April 28, 1963, and was met at her hotel by a friend and hustled off to a large hall in the Royal Hotel reserved as a meeting place for the approximately 7,000 Bahá’ís from around the world. Betty had no more than walked through the door when she suddenly heard several people exclaim; *“There is Betty Becker!”* It was a group of her old friends from Alaska. During her stay she was

able to see the whole Alaska National Spiritual Assembly.

The main conference was held in the Royal Albert Hall and Betty was enthralled with everything. There were, *“many...pioneers from new as well as known countries; many races were represented that I had never heard of; many wore their colorful, native costumes, some Arizona Indians in some of their royal regalia. The historic Royal Albert Hall, where the Congress was held, looked like a huge human garden of colorful flowers...”*

The conference, Betty wrote, was: *“so soul satisfying, all that one could expect and withal such a joyous occasion.”*

Betty and Katharine Meyer each tried to find the other at the conference but with absolutely no success. Afterwards, Betty wrote to Katharine: *“...after looking all over London for you, scrutinizing everyone sitting near me and while walking, telephoned every clue I obtained but with the same result – ‘you were not there’. Two people that I wished to see especially, you and Honor Kempton formerly from Alaska where we were together, I never did meet... Who knows, we never know what surprises fate, or we would say, Bahá'u'lláh, has in store for us.”* Katharine wrote that none of dozens of efforts she made to locate Betty worked, even paging her before one of the sessions. Betty responded saying: *“During the Congress one day, I was with Lina Smithson and told her I believed I heard my name mentioned on the loud speaker. We were talking and you know how you do sometimes not pay any particular attention to the speaker, but Lina said she did not hear anything... It must have been the time when you had me paged.”*

After the Congress, with a group of 38 people, Betty had a bus tour of seven European countries, including Belgium, Luxembourg (where her old Alaskan companion Honor Kempton lived, though she did not get to see her), Germany, Austria, Italy, France and Switzerland. She said that the *“highways where we drove were like one big summer resort, with its lakes, villages and cities nearby – colorful hotels, near the beaches where you can take a dip after breakfast, colorful tables and umbrellas over them... Never saw so many huge cathedrals, castles, fortresses on tops of mountains and other places – I love Italy – Rome with its ancient...places, its coliseum, the Vatican, St. Peter’s Church...”*

While in London, Betty had her eyes examined because they would water when she went out in the wind and felt very weak. The doctor fitted her with glasses and gave certain vitamins and an eye wash. These aids helped and she felt better, but this was the beginning of an ever-increasing problem which Betty had to face during her remaining 11 years.

## **A Center for Punta Arenas**

As in Valdivia, one of the first objectives Betty had upon reaching Punta Arenas was to acquire a Center from which teaching activities could radiate. In January, 1963, a four-room house was offered to the Bahá'ís for 6,000 escudos in cash. Betty promptly wrote to Hugh Chance, secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, asking if there was any possibility of



financial help from the North, but there was none and the proposed purchase fell through.

Betty did find a suite of rooms to rent about the same time. It took her considerable time and effort to find enough furniture to fill it but she soon had a presentable home she could use for her firesides. Her studio had a large sectional couch that could hold 11 people. The owners of the house where she lived, however, did not like her having many visitors so, in October she sold the furniture in her studio and moved to a residential hotel. From the hotel, Betty was able to resume her active teaching.

The Bahá'ís of Punta Arenas did manage finally to rent a room they could use as a Center. The room was above the fire station on Colon Avenue and was large enough for meetings. At first, the firemen would not rent to the group because they had a rule against renting to political or religious groups. When the Bahá'ís assured them that the room would not be used as a church, the deal was made. The Center was financed partly by the National Spiritual Assembly of Chile and partly by Lina Smithson, a Chilean pioneer, and Betty.

## The Early 1960's

Betty's first years in Punta Arenas were difficult. The struggling community had had to contend with apathy, the limitations of a small community, covenant breakers and bad weather. During her first four years in Punta Arenas, not a single new Bahá'í entered the Faith.

In 1964, the big events for Betty

were the election of a new president for Chile and a two-month trip to Santiago. In the election, one of the candidates was the communist Salvadore Allende. Betty noted in her Christmas letter: *"thank goodness we had a peaceful election...nevertheless we are safe for another six years, if the communists do not make trouble for Chile."*

Betty went to Santiago to shop and relax. Before she left Punta Arenas she had developed a cough. After five days in Santiago, the cough put her flat on her back for two weeks. *"You should have heard me, I coughed up and down the scale day and night. I was visiting with a Bahá'í friend when it seemed to really hit me, she would not permit me to go to a hospital and I never saw such beautiful kindness and patience when I was so impatient to go into action. Former friends from Punta Arenas came to visit me and invited me to their home to recuperate. They live in Quillota, about a two hour train ride from Santiago. It is summer in the north of Chile and the climate was perfect, and with the sunshine, their good cooking, fresh fruits and vegetables I was soon back on my feet. After my return I stayed at our Bahá'í Center, a delightful place, with roses and other flowers in bloom, lemon and orange trees in the back yard and a lovely arbor."*

## The Problem with Teaching

The following year, 1965, was marked by inflation and a military tussle with Argentina. Betty had lived in three houses by then but had finally found a residential hotel, the Paris, which she

said was satisfactory.

Teaching the Faith, however, was just as unsatisfactory as it had been. Many people agreed enthusiastically with the Teachings, but she noted: *“They will listen and say it is all very interesting but feel no responsibility that they should improve their own lives. If they can have enough pleasure, parties, dancing and drinking they are in the height of their glory.”*

She did have a few contacts she visited, but continued to have difficulties with the churches in Punta Arenas. She wrote Katharine that: *“The church here – you know which one – is practically forbidding its members to have anything to do with me. I have an English Conversation class and they have warned their people not to go to my classes that it is only a blind for teaching the Faith. Then, too, there is a Protestant minister here who seems to do quite a bit of knocking. At first he was very friendly to me, but now he greets me only with a grunt when I meet him on the street. And he particularly does not like it if I happen to be with one of his church members, which has been the case a time or two.”*

She also wrote that she worked with Lina Smithson in her attempts at teaching. Lina’s husband, Eduardo Roe, was the manager of a London bank in Punta Arenas, a very good social position. Lina: *“would invite me to many of their social gatherings and besides we gave teas and did all we could together, and she would mention the Faith at every opportunity, but all to no avail.”*

Betty was a delegate to the National Convention in Santiago in April, 1966. She spent about a month in the city visiting friends and having her eyes

examined. Instead of medicines, she began trying to cure her eyes with natural remedies prescribed by a naturalist who visited Punta Arenas every several months.

Though Betty was becoming quite elderly, she continued to do what she could to teach the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh and to inspire others. Early in 1967, she wrote a story for the Alaska Bahá’í News about the murder of Lance Craig, the son of a prominent Alaskan Bahá’í who had pioneered to the remote Aleutian town of Unalaska.

In May 1967, Betty sent a long letter to Hand of the Cause Mr. Faizí. In it she apologized because there had been no new enrollments in Punta Arenas in such a long time, but also noted that they had kept their Assembly functioning. She noted that assembly member Berardino Themeus had married and was returning to Punta Arenas with his bride while Dora Handler had been having problems with her leg but was better.

Betty also said that, at the age of 80, for the first time in her life, she had been ill. She had been quite dizzy for several days and had finally gone to see a doctor. She told the doctor that she couldn’t take drugs, but he prescribed a medicine, anyway. When she took the medicine, she said she *“nearly died three times – very close each time – and the fourth time I woke up one morning and could not see. This cleared up in a few weeks but my sight has not recovered to where it was before.”*

Eye trouble plagued her as well. One morning she woke up and could not see at all. The problem was blamed

on too much medication, but other methods did little to help. Her 80-year-old eyes were failing.

Betty planned to attend the Panama International Bahá'í Conference in October, 1967. After the conference, she also hoped to have cornea transplants in both eyes. She had found out that there were good ophthalmologists she could go to in both Bogotá, Columbia and in Panama.

In July, 1967, on the advice of an ophthalmologist in Colombia, Betty flew to Santiago to have her eyes tested to see if they were adaptable enough for cornea transplants. But the tests indicated that her eyes could not stand the operation so, instead of flying on to Colombia, Betty stayed in Santiago for a couple months before going to the International Conference in Panama in October. The test results were a tremendous disappointment to Betty who had so much hoped to have her clear sight restored.

According to her Christmas letter, *“This conference proved to be a healing balm for not being able to have the cornea transplantation. Believe me or not five of my special friends from Alaska were there, many from Canada, from the USA and especially the southern part of the USA, people from Persia and from all over the world, and our special guest was Rúhíyyih Khánúm, the wife of our...Guardian, whom I*

*knew in Michigan at our summer school, before she was the wife of the Guardian so the conference was filled with thrills from the time we got up in the morning until late at night...”*

While at the Panama conference, Betty took a bus ride to the temple site on the hill above Panama City. After a while, Betty mentioned to the lady sitting next to her that she was from Punta Arenas, Chile. The lady gasped in astonishment and quickly introduced herself as Katharine Meyer. The two women had been corresponding ever since Hand of the Cause Mr. Grossman had visited Katharine's pioneer post in Venezuela in 1961, had exchanged many messages at the London Conference in 1963, but had not been able to meet, until finally, on a bus in Panama, the two dedicated pioneers had adjacent seats.

Betty returned to Santiago in October 1967, and continued on to Punta Arenas on the 27th. As soon as she returned home, the Punta Arenas community began excitedly to prepare for a



Adelaida Lopez, Katherine Meyer and Paula Siegel in 1996  
Photo by Rob and Paula Siegel

visit by Rúhíyyih Khánum in December. Much of the publicity work, including the arranging of a reception for Rúhíyyih Khánum and a special lecture, fell to Betty. The visit of the wife of the Guardian was a great event, but afterwards it took Betty two weeks before she could see well enough to work on her Christmas letter.

Two of Betty's goals for 1968 were to attend the International Bahá'í Conference in Palermo, Sicily and to visit the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa, Israel. She even made an initial payment for her plane ticket, but as the time approached, she began coughing more and more. Finally, the cough became so intense that she canceled the whole trip, hoping to get another reservation for the World Center later.

At last, in mid 1968, Punta Arenas had a new Bahá'í. Quite excitedly, Betty wrote to Mr. Faizí to tell him of this great event. The new Bahá'í knew nothing of any religion but was so taken with the Bahá'í spirit that she was hoping to pioneer.

In May, 1969, Katharine Meyer moved to Nueva Imperial in the middle of the Mapuche people in southern Chile. She was appointed an Auxiliary Board member, which gave her the opportunity to visit Punta Arenas and Betty several times over the next several years.

In the spring of 1970, Betty finally had the bounty of a pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Center and of attending the National Convention in Chicago – at the age of 82. With the aid of a small bequest given to her upon the death of her sister, she was able to purchase her

tickets for the trip. Betty left Punta Arenas on April 10 and flew to Santiago where she boarded an Alitalia flight for Rome. She left Rome for Israel on April 13, but her plane was delayed five hours. *“According to the customs of the airlines they owed me a meal and one of the office girls took me to lunch. She said to sit near the office and she would get me a ticket. Soon I heard that my plane was being called and one of the men from the office handed me my ticket...”*

*“It was late when we got to Tel Aviv. I still wanted very much to go to Haifa, but they insisted that I should not go, that it was dangerous. During all the conversation a young man listened very attentively when I was talking to the clerk and standing by with my luggage. The clerk told me to take a taxi to Tel Aviv and stay all night at the hotel, so the young man took me and my luggage, we went out to take a taxi, he entered a garage, came out with a very big beautiful car and told me he would take me to Tel Aviv to an hotel himself, which he did. It took more than half an hour to make this trip to Tel Aviv. Then he told the proprietor of the hotel, who spoke French only, to give me breakfast in the morning and call a taxi to take me to the bus station and when I offered to pay him, giving him a good tip, he said: ‘No thank you, I wanted to do this for you’ and regardless of what I said he refused my money...”*

*“The next morning after breakfast came the taxi driver with a very specially painted taxi. When I told him where to go, he said if you like I shall take you to Haifa myself and help you to find your hotel...which he did. When we got to Haifa, I had no instructions where to go and a*

man, who I found out later was a Bahá'í, stopped the driver and told us where to go.”

On her first morning in Haifa, Betty walked up toward the Shrine of the Báb, stopping at a small shop for something to eat. Inside the shop, she recognized a friend of hers from Kansas City! At the Shrine of the Báb she met one of the members of the Universal House of Justice who told her that she should be very happy because she had passed all her tests.

*“In Haifa I found out that I could stay only 9 days, as I had planned to stay a month. I met with a friend of mine from Kansas City...who was with three other people and I joined them and after Haifa we toured Tel Aviv, Bethlehem, Nasura, Jerusalem, Athens, Greece, Portugal, Spain and came on to the Convention which was in session in Chicago and stayed there three wonderful days. Then from Chicago to Enid, Oklahoma, where my people met me in Oklahoma City.”*

During the convention in Chicago, she was able to become reacquainted with Ruth Mof-fett, one of her very first Bahá'í teachers.

## DEATH OF A MATERIAL BODY BUT LIFE FOR A BAHÁ'Í CENTER

When she returned from her inspiring European journey to Israel and the United States, Betty began concentrating her efforts on finding another Center for Punta Arenas. She wrote to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States hoping for financial help, but was unable to raise any. She also



Betty shortly before her death  
Photo courtesy of the NSA of Alaska

requested a raise in her living allotment since prices had risen in Punta Arenas. Unfortunately, not only did the International Goals Committee for the United States decline her request, it cut her stipend 10% due to increasing commitments for their funds.

Betty kept working for a Center. In a letter to Katharine Meyer on May 13, 1971, she said that she was trying to buy a Center on time payments. The Punta Arenas Fund had 35,000 escudos set aside for this and she hoped that a pioneering couple could live in the Center and make the payments. She suggested that boarders could also help with the payments. Betty said that *“When we have a Center, conditions will change in every way. We have to have a place to meet and we need teachers more than lecturers to come only for a few days...”*

Katharine Meyer had hoped to visit Betty in Punta Arenas since 1961. In July of 1971, after Katharine had changed her pioneering post to Nueva Imperial, Chile, she finally did. She arrived on July 8 and spent about three weeks with Betty. When she returned to Nueva Imperial, Katharine wrote: *“Betty, it was a true joy to get to know you personally for the first time since our correspondence friendship began – that other meeting we had in Panama was too short to count for much. In Punta Arenas it was like two long-time friends talking to each other from the heart, conversing of many things they might not even mention to another person, truly at home together...”*

*“I am proud of you for staying at your difficult post for such a long time, teaching, praying, trying, working, searching for responsive souls, and trusting in the*

*continuous and unwavering assistance of Bahá’ulláh. All your efforts and those of the other Friends in Punta Arenas will have great results.”*

From Betty, Katharine learned the reality of Punta Arenas winter weather (July is the middle of the winter in the southern hemisphere): *“I went to the Lan Chile [airline] office in the morning and from there to the airport, stood in line until well into the afternoon, only to be told that again there would be no flight. It wore me out, and worse than that, several days wasted.”*

A new pioneer, Laurie Schaffer, joined Betty late in 1972 but soon thereafter, two members of the Punta Arenas community died and Katharine returned in December to begin an intense teaching project to save the Assembly. A month later, Counsellor Athos Costas and a youth team went to Punta Arenas to help. When Katharine, Athos and the youth departed, there were 24 new Bahá’ís in Punta Arenas, including 4 adults.

Then on April 29, 1973, Betty suffered a cerebral stroke that left her paralyzed for a time and confined her to bed for the final year and a half of her life.

In October 1973, Rob and Paula Siegel, with their young daughter Lua, pioneered to Punta Arenas at the request of the Chilean National Spiritual Assembly. Betty was convalescing in a local residence when they arrived and, since they were all on the Local Spiritual Assembly together, assembly meetings were often held around Betty’s bed.

Afterwards, either Laurie or the Siegels helped Betty writing her dictated letters.

On July 10, 1974, the Center fund received a big boost. The Aleutian Development Co. in which Betty had invested money so long ago in Alaska, liquidated its corporation and sent Betty a check for her portion – \$3,866.94. Betty requested that the full amount be placed in the Center Fund with the National Spiritual Assembly.

Betty's dream of a real Center for Punta Arenas came true on September 20, 1974 when a house at 554 Mexicana Street was purchased. Betty's contributions of money and energy resulted in enough being available for a down pay-

ment on the house with money to spare for repairs and furniture.

Shortly before Betty passed from this world, the Siegel's son, Justin, was born. Rob wrote that he and Paula brought their newborn son to Betty's, noting that, *"It was as though her soul was exchanged for this newly born babe."*

Pneumonia marred her last week in this world. Rob wrote that: *"Just before her passing, we finalized the deed for the purchase of the center. We brought it to Betty and placed it in her hands. She smiled ever so sweetly."* With the deed in hand for the first local Hazirtu'l-Quds



Betty's Punta Arenas Bahá'í Center



in Chile, Betty must have decided that she had done all she could in this world. Seven days later, on September 27, 1974, at 11 PM, the spirit of Betty Becker left her withered body and passed into the Abhá Realm. Her last hours were spent in the company of her dear friend Gwendolyn Willems who was at her side when she passed on.

After her death, her body was anointed with rose water from Persia and three rose petals from the three most Holy Shrines were placed between her fingers. John Caruana, a Bahá'í from Porvenir, across the Straits of Magellan



Betty Becker and Paula with Justin and Lua  
Photo by Rob and Paula Siegel

*was a wisdom in her long illness – because Betty had a dream. A dream for a Bahá’i Center in Punta Arenas. It was just one week before her passing that the long-sought-for deed to the Bahá’i property was secured and which marked the beginning of an illness which consummated*

*in Betty’s death. What great proof of the All-Encompassing Mercy of the Almighty Provider!*

*“Thanks to Betty’s generous contributions we were able to make the down payment on a house, to buy the necessary furniture, and make a few needed repairs. It is strange how it all came about. Mysteriously a check arrived...mysteriously because it was the exact amount needed to cover unexpected expenses.”<sup>23</sup>*

In Anchorage, on November 20, 1974, a memorial service was held for Betty at the Consortium Library of the University of Alaska sponsored by the Anchorage Local Spiritual Assembly where about 25 commemorated Betty’s sacrifice and service. Two of the participants were non-Bahá’is who had known Betty when she lived in Anchorage.

Betty had wanted a grave to herself,

<sup>23</sup> In Memoriam, Betty Becker, by Janet Stout and Rob and Paula Siegel, National Bahá’i Archives, United States.

from Punta Arenas on Tierra del Fuego Island, placed a small envelope of dust from the Tomb of Mullá Husayn on her breast. Rob Siegel and John carved a flower-like 9-pointed star for her headstone.

Paula Siegel wrote: *“The next morning, Sunday, September 29, there was a small service, where she had lived, and where we read the Bahá’i funeral prayers. From there we walked in procession to the cemetery where a few words were said about Betty’s sacrifice and devotion, followed by more readings. There were about thirty friends gathered for the graveside service and afterwards, we held a reception at the Bahá’i Center in Betty’s honor. As was always Betty’s way, we served fruit salad to the guests.*

*“Betty had longed so for the next life, and at last her wish was fulfilled. Many times she had said: ‘I just don’t understand why ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is keeping me here. Am I going to live forever?’ she would add laughingly. And we always knew there*





Above: Betty's funeral  
 Below: Lua, Rob and Justin Siegel at Betty's grave  
 Photo by Rob and Paula Siegel



which tended not to be the custom in Chile where families were usually buried one on top of the other in the same site. Initial efforts to secure an empty site in the crowded Punta Arenas cemetery had been unsuccessful but with perseverance, one site was discovered before she died.

Even after her worldly death, Betty continued helping the Punta Arenas Center. She had passed a special Bahá'í ring on to Gwendolyn Willems and had

asked her to send it to Alaska to be sold. Money from the sale was to be used for the Center. Gwendolyn sent the ring to Counsellor Lauretta King in Alaska. There, by auction, the ring was sold to a native Bahá'í for about \$1,000.

Honor Kempton, who had also arisen to the Guardian's Alaska challenge in 1939, wrote of Betty's passing: *"I know that she has had a glorious welcome in the other world, for she has done just what Bahá'u'lláh has asked us to do: Teach My Cause."*<sup>24</sup>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Most of the material in this booklet came from Betty Becker herself, in the form of

her voluminous correspondence and a short history she wrote for Alaska in 1947. She kept the letters sent to her as well as copies of much of her outgoing correspondence. The collection of letters from Hands of the Cause, House of Justice members, Counsellors and other notable Bahá'ís discovered in the

<sup>24</sup> In Memoriam, Betty Becker, by Janet Stout and Rob and Paula Siegel, National Bahá'í Archives, United States..



Gwendolyn Willems and Sharon O'Toole at Betty's grave

time with her in Punta Arenas. With very few photos being found of Betty, their photos are invaluable. They also added their photos of Katharine Meyer and so put a face on another illustrious Bahá'í woman.

Mark Instenes took the time to go to the Alaska State Library and find the old newspaper story that announced

attic of the Punta Arenas Bahá'í Center was amazing.

Katharine Meyer provided me with both letters she wrote to Betty and also letters Betty wrote to her. By adding her commentary about the letters and events they described, she added significantly to the story from the early 1960's until Betty's death.

Lewis Walker, from the National Bahá'í Archives of the United States kindly located and sent me correspondence between Betty and a variety of correspondents, many of which contained fascinating personal glimpses of Betty's life as a pioneer.

David Baumgartner, Secretary of the Alaska National Spiritual Assembly searched their archives for photos of Betty, providing me with the photo on the cover and the photos of Betty in Alaska. He also provided me with the photos of the first Local Spiritual Assembly in Alaska.

Rob and Paula Siegel provided stories and photos of Betty from their

Betty's arrival in Juneau.

Sergio Aparicio, from Chile, sent me his personal remembrances of both Katharine Meyer and Betty Becker which helped fill in a few details in the story.

Then, when the manuscript was in its final stages, Maurice Sabour-Pickett, John Goggins, Val Moore and Sharon O'Toole gave it a good going over and offered many helpful suggestions and corrections.

I am extremely grateful to all who helped with this portrait of a valiant servant and pioneer.



REPORT PASSING  
ABHA KINGDOM BETTY  
BECKER SEPTEMBER TWENTY  
EIGHT...ASSURE PRAYERS  
HOLY SHRINES PROGRESS SOUL.  
BETTY BECKER VALIANT SERVANT  
FAITH PIONEER ALASKA, PUNTA  
ARENAS, CHILE. MADE VITAL  
CONTRIBUTION ROOTS CAUSE  
NORTH, SOUTH AMERICA

UNIVERSAL HOUSE  
OF JUSTICE, 1974

# INDEX

## *A*

'Abdu'l-Bahá 7  
Aguero, Gastón Eduardo 31  
Aguirre, Enrique 28  
Alexander, Agnes 9, 14, 39  
Allende, Salvadore 41  
Allen, Joy 17, 18  
Aparicio, Sergio 50

## *B*

Baumgartner, David 50  
Bedikian, Victoria 13, 15  
Been, Loraine 22, 23  
Bierman, Marilyn 30  
Brown, Helen 27

## *C*

Caldwell, Jenabe 19, 24  
Caroana, John 47  
Cascara, Councilor Elsie 28  
Collins, Amelia 9  
Costas, Councilor Athos 31, 39, 46  
Craig, Lance 42

## *D*

de Jaramilla, Maria 31  
de Mancada, Clarita 31  
de Trench, Laura 31  
Dodge, Myrtle 18, 21  
Dole, Dagmar 22, 23

## *F*

Frazier, Terrell 22, 23  
French, Chuck 5  
French, Linda 5

## *G*

Gail, Marzieh 9  
Gardner, Jane 24

Garnett, Louise 5  
Gilmore, Mr. 9  
Goggins, John 50  
Goharriz, Mr. 36  
Goharriz, Mrs. 36  
Green, Florence 21, 22, 23  
Green, Margaret 14  
Gregory, Gayne V. 14  
Groger, Roger 36  
Grossmann, Anna 31  
Guertin, Alice 15  
Guertin, Frank 15

## *H*

Handler, Dora 35  
Hands of the Cause  
Grossmann, Herman 5, 30, 31, 38,  
43  
Horace Holley 5  
Leroy Ioas 5, 9, 11  
Mason Remey 37, 50  
Mr. Faizi 5, 37  
Mr. Furutan 5  
Remey, Mason 37  
William Sears 5  
Hoagg, Emogene 9, 10, 14  
Holley, Horace 9, 25  
Huffman, Evelyn 25  
Husayn, Mullá 48

## *I*

Insteness, Mark 50

## *J*

Jack, Marion 14  
Johnson, Mary 27

## *K*

Kempton, Honor 5, 8, 11, 14, 15, 17,  
18, 21, 22, 23, 25, 40, 49, 56

Khamsch, Auxiliary Board member 38  
Khuli Khan, Ali 9  
King, Councilor Lauretta 49

### *L*

Lamb, Artemus 37  
Latorre, Elena 31  
Lopez, Adelaida 43  
Lundquist, Mina 21, 22, 23

### *M*

Mayberry, Florence 9  
McLaughlin, Katherine 26, 40  
Meyer, Katharine 38, 40, 42, 43, 44,  
46, 50  
Moffett, Ruth 9, 10, 18, 45  
Moore, Val 50  
Moul, Georgine 23, 24  
Moul, Pat 23, 24

### *N*

Nicklin, Eve 26

### *O*

Oliver, Ethel Ross 21, 23  
Oliver, Simeon 21  
O'Toole, Dorie 54  
O'Toole, Regan 5  
O'Toole, Sharon 5, 50, 54

### *R*

Reid, Alexander 28  
Rexford, Orcella 8, 9, 10, 14  
Rhein, Otilie 30, 31  
Rice, Susan 14  
Roe, Eduardo 39, 42  
Rúhíyyih Khánúm 5, 25, 38, 39, 43, 44  
Russell, Dorothy 24  
Russell, Edgar 24

### *S*

Sabour-Pickett, Maurice 50  
Salvo, Manuel 31, 34

Schaffer, Laurie 46  
Schultz, Rolando 31  
Shoghi Effendi 5, 8, 15, 16, 25, 38, 56  
Showalter, Mrs. 19  
Siegel, Justin 47, 48  
Siegel, Lua 46, 48  
Siegel, Paula 43, 46, 47, 48, 50  
Siegel, Rob 46, 47, 48, 50  
Smithson, Lina 28, 41, 42  
Stout, Janet 5, 37  
Stout, Vern 18, 21, 22, 23

### *T*

Themeus, Bernardino 42

### *U*

Universal House of Justice member  
Hugh Chance 5

### *W*

Walker, Lewis 50  
Wells, Frances 21, 22, 23  
Whitenack, Janet 15, 17, 22, 23  
Willems, Gwendolyn 5, 47, 49

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I grew up in New Mexico with a three-year stay on Kwajalein in the Marshall Islands of the central Pacific then moved to Alaska in 1972 for graduate school.

In 1977, I fell off of a mountain. The body fell, but the soul did not and I was very aware that the part that was falling was superfluous and unnecessary to the part that was not. It was an insight into the spiritual side of life that made me listen with deep interest when Sharon (then Pegues) told me of the Bahá'í Faith a year later. That insight allowed me to give Sharon the wedding present, on the day we were married, of a signed card declaring my belief in Bahá'u'lláh.

In 1986, we found ourselves rather surprisingly at the dedication of the House of Worship in New Delhi, India. For me, it was a life-changing event that resulted in our becoming pioneers to Chile in 1989. Following Betty Becker's footsteps, we first lived in Valdivia for a year before moving on to Labranza, next to Radio Bahá'í.

After six years amongst the Mapuche people in Chile, we attempted to fill an unusual Chilean goal by pioneering to Siberia. We made it as far as Alaska before mysterious circumstances forced us to end our Siberian quest. The mystery of our enforced stay in Alaska was soon revealed when Sharon's mother, Dorie, was afflicted with leukemia, passing away in 1998.

With Dorie's passing, we were able to realize a long-time goal of Sharon's by pioneering to Ireland the next year. We now live in the Alaska House in the countryside of Ireland, a 10-minute walk from the small village of Ballinagh. Sharon grows things and I mow the lawn. Occasionally, I write things as well.





Betty Becker discovered Bahá'u'lláh in 1933. Six years later, she answered a call from Shoghi Effendi and pioneered to Alaska, along with Honor Kempton. After twenty years of dedicated service to the Faith, Betty, then 73 years old, pioneered to Chile at the opposite end of the globe. Many Bahá'ís have pioneered to the far corners of the world. Many have gone alone. But how many have undertaken the sacrifice of beginning a completely new life in a totally new cultural setting — at the age of 73?

Because of her pioneering efforts and steadfastness, Betty was one of the early shining stars of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. She dedicated virtually her whole Bahá'í life to God in the service of pioneering. Betty became a Bahá'í when she was 46 and spent 34 of her next 41 year as a pioneer, ultimately leaving her physical remains in Punta Arenas, Chile.