

SHINING LAMP

A Bahá'í who served humanity with radiance



Richard St. Barbe Baker (1889–1982): Man of the Trees

When he was only about six, Richard St. Barbe Baker convinced his nanny to let him explore the woods alone near his home in England. As he wandered around the pine forest with the sun's rays filtering through the trees, he felt excited.

"I became intoxicated with the beauty around me," he later wrote, "immersed in the joyousness and exultation of feeling a part of it all." His love of the woods later took him around the world, and he became known as St. Barbe and "Man of the Trees."

After working at a lumber camp in Canada and serving in World War I in Europe, St. Barbe graduated from the School of Forestry at Cambridge University in England.

Dance of the Trees

St. Barbe went to Kenya on an assignment for the British government in 1920. Masses of trees were being cut down to create fields for agriculture. To restore the forests, St. Barbe did something unheard of at the time: he consulted with the native Africans. He learned the Kikuyu tribe's history, language, and customs.

St. Barbe knew that dance was an important part of Kikuyu culture, so he organized a Dance of the Trees. Three thousand warriors came, dressed in full costume. Before the dancing started, St. Barbe asked for volunteers to take an oath to protect and plant trees. These volunteers became the first Men of the Trees.

Soon other tribes joined in, using the motto "twahamwe": "We are all working together as one man."

Faith and Reforestation

In 1924, St. Barbe gave a talk at a religious conference, where he learned about the Bahá'í Faith. He soon embraced the religion. He later said that becoming a Bahá'í was the beginning of his true life. Shoghi Effendi, the leader of the Bahá'í community at the time, met St. Barbe in 1929 and became the first life member of Men of the Trees.

St. Barbe spent the rest of his life intertwining the Bahá'í teachings and his love of nature. He developed conservation projects, started tree-planting programs, organized gatherings

for leaders to consult about the environment, and led expeditions into the Sahara Desert, which he hoped to reforest. He gave lectures all over the world and was the first Bahá'í to gain international recognition for environmental work. He wrote 30 books, mainly about forestry and conservation. His organization, Men of the Trees, continues today. It's known in some places as the International Tree Foundation.

Days before his death in 1982 at age 92, St. Barbe planted a tree at the University of Saskatchewan, demonstrating his own words: "Today it is the duty of every thinking being to live and to serve not only his own day and generation, but also generations unborn, by helping to restore and maintain the green glory of the forests of the earth."



St. Barbe led an expedition to help recover land from the Sahara Desert in 1952. He wrote, "Trees are forever giving to life; they are giving more than they take."