

SHINING LAMP

A Bahá'í who served humanity with radiance

Agnes Alexander (1875–1971)

By Gail Radley



In her youth, Agnes Alexander believed she was “extremely timid,” but through faith and determination, she became a great adventurer.

She was the youngest of five, born in Honolulu in 1875. Agnes felt happiest with cats and horses. She worried that, unlike her grandparents, who had moved to Hawaii to teach their religion, Christianity hadn't stirred her heart. She left Hawaii (which wasn't yet a state) to attend college in the U.S.

After traveling to the U.S. and Europe with friends in 1900, her life changed. In Italy, Agnes met a Bahá'í, Charlotte Dixon, who was joyful after visiting the Bahá'í leader, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Israel. Hearing about the Bahá'í Faith brought a spiritual awakening. It “came to me that it was the Truth,” Agnes said.

Agnes traveled to Paris, staying three months to learn from the Bahá'ís there. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote her, “Be . . . a divine bird, proceed to thy native country . . .”

First Bahá'í in Hawaii

In December 1901, when she was 26, she returned to Honolulu, realizing, “I was . . . the first Bahá'í to touch that soil . . . God raised me up to carry His Message to these islands.” Despite disapproval from her family, Agnes shared her new religion with others. Soon there was a Bahá'í group.

When Agnes's parents died in 1913, she left Hawaii to visit North America. Then 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that “Divine confirmations,” would come by turning “toward Japan.”

Global Adventures

In 1914, World War I began. Agnes was headed to Japan, and her ship sailed at night without lights to avoid being seen by nearby warships. She became one of the first two Bahá'ís living in Japan. In Tokyo, she learned Esperanto, a world language. She also learned Braille, a script for the blind. They helped her teach the Bahá'í Faith. In six trips to Japan, she served there around 32 years and spoke in many cities.

One day, while praying, Agnes related, “like a flash of light, a great joy filled my heart . . . I would go to Korea and take His Message.” In 1920, over a month's time, she spoke with community leaders and to

audiences of up to 900 in Korea.

In 1923, Agnes was in Japan when a catastrophic earthquake struck. Huge waves flooded the land and fires raged. About 140,000 people died. Many more were left homeless, including Agnes. She traveled to Korea, China, the Philippines, the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

In 1957, Agnes was appointed a Hand of the Cause of God.* She was also elected to the nine-member group leading the Bahá'ís of North East Asia and served six years.

Whether journeying through China by donkey-cart in winter, facing multitudes in Korea, or slipping past warships, Agnes changed her timidity to courage. No wonder that when she left this earth in 1971 at age 95, the Universal House of Justice called her a “shining example.”



Agnes Alexander traveled to Japan in 1914. She helped to share the Bahá'í teachings there for over 30 years.