



Building Bonds Between East and West

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MARTHA WASHINGTON AND NINE Founding Fathers gazed down from their niches upon ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as he swept through their white, marble-cladded domain shortly before 9 p.m. on Friday, April 26, 1912.¹ Three sheaves of wheat, a plow, a sailing ship, and an eagle had been emblazoned on a shield at his feet, and set into the center of the pink marble floor on a medallion twenty-four inches wide. The words *SEAL OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA* ringed its circumference in bronze.²

The Pennsylvania Foyer was the main entrance to Memorial Continental Hall, the brand new national headquarters of the Daughters of the American Revolution. It stood in Classical Revival style on 17th Street, NW, between C and D Streets, in the old neighborhood of Foggy Bottom just north of the National Mall. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was about to deliver his final public speech in the nation’s capital in Continental Hall’s main auditorium, at 9 p.m., to the single largest audience he had yet addressed in America.³ The crowd overflowed into the balconies.

White American eagles with outstretched wings perched above the three levels of box seats on either side of the stage.⁴ On this night, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would share the podium with Samuel Gompers, the President of the American Federation of

¹ National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, *Handbook of Memorial Continental Hall* (Washington, DC: The Carnahan Press, 1915), 11; Daughters of the American Revolution, “Pennsylvania Foyer Virtual Tour,” Adobe Flash panorama, accessed July 10, 2013, <http://www.dar.org/omni/virtualtours/museum/PA.html>.

² Daughters, “Pennsylvania,” panorama; “Symbols of Pennsylvania,” Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, accessed July 10, 2013, http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/things/4280/symbols_of_pennsylvania/478690. The size of the medallion has been determined by careful visual examination of the panorama.

³ Agnes Parsons, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America: Agnes Parsons’ Diary, April 11, 1912–November 11, 1912*, ed. Richard Hollinger (Los Angeles: Kalimát Press, 1996), 51; Robert H. Stockman, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America*, (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing, 2012), 105–106; Mahmúd-i-Zarqání, *Mahmúd’s Diary: The Diary of Mirzá Mahmúd-i-Zarqání Chronicling ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Journey to America*, trans. Mohi Sobhani (Oxford: George Ronald, 1998), 63. Parsons writes that they left the house at a quarter to nine.

⁴ Daughters, *Handbook*, 12; National Register of Historic Places, Memorial Continental Hall, Washington, DC, National Register #72001427, accessed July 10, 2013, <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NHLS/Text/72001427.pdf>.

Labor.⁵ Gompers made a plea for the women of the working classes. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the *Washington Star* reported, drew a parallel between the advancement of women in the West and in the East. He cited the hall they stood in, which had been built by the women of the D. A. R., as an example of the progress of women in the Western hemisphere.⁶

The meeting had been organized by the Orient-Occident Unity, a DC organization dedicated to building bonds of friendship between East and West. On his first night in Washington, last Saturday, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had delivered the keynote address at their conference in the Carnegie Library on Massachusetts Avenue. That evening he had called for a “reciprocal alliance” between the United States of America and the nation of Persia, now Iran.⁷

“[F]or the Americans,” he said, “there could be no better industrial outlet and market than the virgin commercial soil of Persia. The mineral wealth of Persia is still latent and untouched. It is my hope that the great American democracy may be instrumental in developing these hidden resources and that a bond of perfect amity and unity may be established between the American republic and the government of Persia.”⁸

“It is, therefore, hoped that the American and Persian nations may be conjoined and united in reciprocal love. May they become one race endowed with the same susceptibilities. May these bonds of amity and accord be firmly established.”⁹

⁵ Parsons, *Diary*, 52; “Tells of Bahai Ideals,” *Washington Star*, April 27, 1912 (photocopy, National Bahá’í Archives, Wilmette, IL).

⁶ “Tells of Bahai Ideals,” *Washington Star*.

⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Talk at Occident-Orient-Unity Conference, Public Library Hall, Washington, D.C., 23 April 1912,” *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*, 2nd ed., comp. Howard MacNutt (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982), 35.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

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FOOTNOTE/ENDNOTE:

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