

## The Bellemont Bahá'i School Story

The Bellemont Bahá'i School is located on a small parcel of land surrounded on all sides by the United States Forest Service. Its name is taken from the community of Bellemont, Arizona that was founded as a fueling station for steam locomotives running between Chicago and Los Angeles before Arizona became a state in 1912. The name is French for "[beautiful mountain](#)," referring to the 12,600' San Francisco Peaks that dominate the landscape seen from the

Bellemont Prairie. With the exception of being near the Santa Fe Railroad and Route 66, the building site chosen for the School was wilderness in 1957. Construction of the four lane US I-40 that replaced the old two lane highway was started after World War II and well after Flagstaff Bahá'is began building the School. Work began with construction of a foundation for a cabin that was moved to the site in 1958. However, many years would pass before the road was improved and the infrastructure for future development was realized. The property was purchased and deeded to the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of Flagstaff in 1962, but a master plan for the School was not forthcoming until the Bellemont Bahá'i School Committee was formed in August of 1986. The committee was the first inter-community Bahá'i group working at the grass root level in Arizona with members appointed by their local spiritual assemblies and groups. In 1989, guidelines identifying spiritual assembly and committee responsibilities were written and adopted.



*The photograph above shows the members of the first Flagstaff LSA formed in 1957. Pictured: front row, l to r. Helen Becker, Louise Becker and Elizabeth Coke. Middle, l to r. are Bill McCormick, Calvin Barr, Timothy Becker, Nina Seibert and Gisela McCormick. Danny Gimlin is shown on the top left.*

Currently there are 38 members from 13 local spiritual assemblies and 5 groups serving on the committee. A significant increase in financial support for the School followed the formation of the committee, but the means of protecting the financial investments made by other Bahá'i communities was not accomplished until 1996, when members of the Flagstaff Local Spiritual Assembly were able to grant to the Local Spiritual Assemblies and Groups a vested interest through the committee members providing service to the School. Also, three amendments were attached to the deed of ownership as a means of assuring Bahá'is everywhere the property will remain the site of a Bahá'i School.

However, assuring the property will remain a school does not mean all things that make a school have been accomplished. Providing an infrastructure having the essential utilities took years to achieve. When the needed utilities became available in 1989, a shower building with restrooms and an upstairs library was constructed. More recently a commercial grade kitchen with a large ramada was completed in time for the annual Bellemont Baha'i Summer School held on July 4, 2011. The School



*The photograph above is of the assembly members who incorporated the LSA in 1959. Shown in the first row, l to r. are Louise Becker, Gisela Mc Cormick, Helen Becker, Donna Jenkins and Frances Latham. In the back row, l to r. are Harry Hambly, Bill McCormick, Val Latham Sr. and Hilde McCormick.*

provides programs enriching Baha'i life, strengthening our community, and building a Baha'i future, while providing continuity of giving from one generation to another. Many future projects will be forthcoming as funds become available. The achievements made over the last fifty-five years are lighting the way as the dream of a small band of unabashed home front pioneers continues to unfold. Their love for the Bahá'í Faith lives on in an ever advancing legacy started in 1956.

A note of interest to the story of the Flagstaff Bahá'í Bahá'is and the Bellemont Bahá'í School is related to Shoghi Effendi's call for a Ten Year World Crusade in 1952. Prior to his call Flagstaff, Arizona had been opened to the Bahá'í Faith in 1949, by a single home front pioneer. Two years into the Crusade in a letter to the American Bahá'is in 1954, the Guardian called for the formation of a local spiritual assembly in Flagstaff. That goal was achieved as a dazzling series of events that began to unfold in 1956, when a gutsy Bahá'í Group of home front pioneers decided to make "Bahá'í" a household word in their small city of about 6,000 people. Concurrently, the group confidently decided to enter into a five year lease option agreement to purchase a property in the Bellemont area while looking for a ninth member to form a Local Spiritual Assembly. The goal was achieved in 1957, but it split the group. By the following year in 1958, the group was reunited when the community of Sunny Side located on the eastern border of Flagstaff was annexed. The enlargement of the community resulting from the annexation immediately resulted in filing for incorporation of the assembly. Everyone was motivated by the thought that the action would result in an unbroken chain of unity from the Universal House of Justice, not yet elected, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of the United States, down to the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of Flagstaff, Arizona. In 1959 the assembly was incorporated. In another four years the property for a School was purchased and deeded to the assembly by 1962, as the World Crusade ended. Regrettably, Shoghi Effendi's life on this earth had ended in 1957, five years before the World Crusade's conclusion and before he would have learn of any of the events that took place in Flagstaff. The Bahá'is in Flagstaff took pride in thinking the Guardian would have been pleased with their fortitude as they worked to teach the Faith in a special place in the World where he had asked for a Bahá'í community. Often communities with functioning assemblies are hard to find and harder to keep. We sometimes too easily forget that Shoghi Effendi constantly urged the Bahá'is to learn their Faith and intrepidly take the message of Baha'u'lláh to the people of the World! The Flagstaff home front pioneers were undaunted as they presented the Bahá'í Faith to people in their city.