



## Khalil Totah: The Unknown Years

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*During an educational career of about twenty-five years [1919-44] with and for the Arabs, I was overwhelmed with the political, economic, and social problems confronting them. Having known America and the West, I was consumed with the passion of doing my part towards the creation of a new Arab World.<sup>1</sup>—Khalil Totah*

Except for the memory of Khalil Totah as the six-year principal (1919-25) of the prestigious British Mandate's Men's Education Training College [MTC], later known as the *Kuliyyah al-'Arabiyya*, or the Government Arab College in Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> and his 18 years (1927-44) as a teacher and the principal of one of Mandate Palestine's academically successful mission schools, the Friends Boys School (FBS) of Ramallah, there is surprisingly little known or written about him.<sup>3</sup> The FBS students, teachers, and administrators today are reminded of

Khalil Totah, in his Ottoman soldier's uniform, April 1914. *Source: T. Ricks*

Khalil Totah every time they enter ‘Khalil Totah Hall’ for convocations, theatrical performances, and graduation exercises on the present campus of FBS or, by chance, notice Totah’s bust in the school’s library. Secondly, we know that he testified in January 1937 before the Royal Peel Commission in Jerusalem, and later in January 1946, before the equally well-known Anglo-American Commission Inquiry into Palestine in Washington, D.C. In addition, he authored and co-authored eight books in English and Arabic on education, history, and geography in addition to the widely distributed special edition of the 1932 *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science* (Philadelphia, PA) which he co-edited and included his much-quoted article on “Education in Palestine.”<sup>4</sup>

While he published innumerable articles in newspapers and journals in Palestine and in the United States, and his picture appeared in multiple sources during his 1945-50 speaking circuits in the US, Totah’s biography and picture in the normally accurate Jerusalem-based PASSIA website were until recently both inaccurate and misidentified.<sup>5</sup> Except for a handful of American Quaker accounts of the Ramallah schools, Khalil Abdullah Totah remains obscure and an enigma to many Palestinians, to the Arab world, and to those in the Palestinian Diaspora.<sup>6</sup>

It is the thesis of this work that Khalil Totah was among the few Palestinian educators and intellectuals who fully grasped the critical role of education in the liberation and development of Palestine in all that that implied, and who constantly argued for girls’ education and women’s professional role in society, for the need for Palestinian-centred educational reform in both towns and villages, and for the multiple benefits of joint schooling for Jews, Muslims and Christians within a practical and liberal curricula. Zionist opposition from the 1920s on to all mixed or cooperative educational systems defeated repeated attempts by the Mandate Department of Education to use the schools and educators to build bridges between the European Jewish colonies and Jewish Agency, and the indigenous Palestinian communities. If the Jewish *Vaad Leumi* or National Council had its way, not one Jewish boy or girl would have been in either the British government or European and American missionary schools, including the Friends schools of Ramallah. Divided by familial, local, and career interests, on the other hand, Palestine’s leaders frequently failed to inspire, unite, or forge a cohesive educational program, a department of education, or national state-building institutions so necessary in those waning years of British colonial rule and rising Zionist activism, skullduggery, and violence. Indeed, in the course of Khalil’s 1952 four-month visit to the Fertile Crescent and to Egypt, he reflected on a subject found in his earlier diaries, lectures, and published writings when he wrote that:

*A whole generation of Palestine Arabs received [an] university education in Beirut, Cairo, England, France, Germany and the United States. That generation was highly intelligent and patriotic. They were sincere and honest, but the fact remains that the entire generation did not produce the*

*needed leader. In the battle during the Arab revolt against the British – 1936-39 – and later against the Jews, it was the fellahin hardy stock which bore the brunt of the fighting. Without begrudging the university boys their share in serving their country, to me, the one who stood out, fought, was wounded, led his men to battle and finally made the supreme sacrifice at Kastal, near Jerusalem, was Abd al Qadir Husaini. Musa Alami was not Turkish trained, but the product of an illustrious British university [Cambridge], famed for turning out men to meet a crisis. He was weighted in the balance and found wanting, as far as supreme political leadership was concerned.<sup>7</sup>*

For Khalil Totah, the essential issues facing the Arab world in general and Palestine in particular were strong national leadership, political unity, and imaginative social strategies. While it is curious that he did not ask himself the same searching questions about the qualities for national leadership, at least in writing, he did wonder why Palestine's educated elite had so misjudged the political conditions of post-World War II Palestine. He himself admitted that: "Never did I believe, however, that it was possible for the Jews to do what they did [in 1948]. On the contrary, it was my firm belief that if the British were only out of the way, the Arabs could dispose of the Jews in a short time. That opinion was shared by almost everybody."<sup>8</sup>

His personal diaries, letters, and writings focused continually on the need for a united and independent Palestine, and yet his own patriotism and national loyalty were challenged publicly by Palestinians who saw his close cooperation with both British and American officials as suspect at best and collaborative at worst. Raised in a small, rural, traditional Palestinian Christian community, and imbued with strong social and cultural preferences, Totah in time emerged as politically and intellectually liberal but socially and economically conservative. He spent the majority of his life attempting to reconcile his increasingly privileged social status and Arab identity in both Palestinian and American societies with his empathies for the poor Arab, the underprivileged American, and oppressed Palestinian refugees. In the end, he opted for an American life, an Arab-American identity, and supporter of US foreign policies as opposed to a Palestinian life, an Arab identity, and supporter of radical Arab ideologies for social change. He did so at the dawn of the Cold War and in the twilight of a Palestinian state. For Totah, the year of 1948 was his political and personal watershed when his old world of Palestine was savaged, shattered, and in disarray, and his new world of imperial American was at the dawn of the Cold War against communist Russia. As an immigrant and American citizen, Totah had made his choice between the 'new' and 'old' world. His 1952 four-month tour of the newly-fragmented post-World War II Fertile Crescent was less an eye opener for him, but rather a confirmation of the correctness of his choice to side with America in the emerging global contest between capitalism and socialism. For Totah, there were no other moral, religious, or political choices in the new age of the Cold War. It was a contest of good against evil.

The present work is thus neither a critique nor a defence of Khalil Totah. It is an explanation of the lifetime struggles of a humble man who saw himself as a part of the ‘common people’ living and working in extraordinary times.<sup>9</sup> His own works, words, and life work are testimony enough of his deep religious and ethical convictions, of his abiding support for Palestinian education and its progressive goals, and of his continuous love for Palestine and the Arab world. At the same time, he did not hesitate in his letters, diaries, and publications to show his enormous admiration and fondness for American people, society, and politics. That his passion for Palestine and admiration for America could ever become a contradiction or a source of personal conflict did not trouble him nor become apparent in any of his writings. He warmly embraced both his Palestinian past, and his American present and future.

Khalil Totah’s life work can be divided into four periods beginning with his Ramallah childhood years (1886 to 1900) and then the launching of his intellectual, social and psychological development (1901 to 1919) with school years at Ramallah and Brummana Friends, and then at the Church Mission Society’s (CMS) English College in Jerusalem. Soon after, he left Palestine for the United States to complete his high school diploma at Oak Grove Friends School in Vassalboro, Maine, and then his bachelor and master degrees in the United States first at Clark College in Worcester, Massachusetts, and then in New York City at Columbia University’s Teachers College. He returned to Palestine in 1912 renewed and ready to begin his new life tasks at his beloved FBS in Ramallah. It was in this second period that Totah was drafted for three months into the Ottoman army, married Ermina Jones, and then volunteered for a year of Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) work in wartime France. Totah’s third and most important academic, educational, and political period (1920 to 1944) began auspiciously when he became the principal of the elite British Men’s Elementary Training College (MTC) in East Jerusalem or the ‘Government Arab College’; occasionally it was spoken about in Mandate memoranda and letters as the founding stone for a future Palestinian university.<sup>10</sup> Taking advantage of a generous scholarship, Khalil returned to Columbia University in 1925, completed his doctoral degree and dissertation (*Contribution of Arabs to Education*) at the Teachers College in 1926 before returning to Palestine for the second time to begin another tenure as principal of FBS in Ramallah (1927 to 1944). The final period (1945 to 1955) was his stay in New York as the executive director of the short-lived Institute for Arab-American Affairs (IAAA), and then his retirement as a lecturer and writer in Whittier California.

## **The Ramallah Formative Years, 1886 to 1901**

Born in Ramallah in Ottoman Palestine on 20 May 1886, Khalil Totah was one of 12 children of Ramallah Quaker parents, Abdallah Totah and Azizeh Mughannam. Like the majority of Palestinian Christians, both Abdallah and Azizeh came from Greek Orthodox families but, following the 1869 arrival of the American Quaker

missionaries, Eli and Sibyl Jones, both parents converted to Friends Christianity.<sup>11</sup> As so often happened in the villages of the Middle East and elsewhere, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century hygienic and physical conditions were harsh for young and old alike. Out of the eight girls and four boys born in Khalil's family, seven children survived to live healthy and busy lives in turn-of-the-century Palestine. Helaneh, Martha, Na'meh and Nasra were his older sisters. The first two spent a lifetime of work at the boarding Friends Girls School (FGS), in the Hope Friends Day schools in Ramallah, and in the village Day School of Ein 'Arik in one capacity or another as matrons, teachers, or staff assistants.<sup>12</sup> Totah had two brothers, Ibrahim and Salem who followed him to the United States both attending Friends colleges; Ibrahim graduated from Haverford College in Haverford, Pennsylvania as did Khalil's son, Nabil, while Salem attended Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana.

As Khalil's father was a weaver of woollen outer garments for men, the Totah family lived in sparse and increasingly cramped quarters. Typical of Palestine's peasantry, Khalil's childhood was 'lean' in many ways – from his meals and bedding to toys and his daily life. Being forever observant, Khalil wrote his first of many articles during his lifetime on a familiar village activity, "A Description of Harvest and Threshing Time."<sup>13</sup> One feature, however, emerges from his autobiographical *Journal*, and that was his devotion to learning at the Ramallah FGS and FBS. He admitted that he owed much to his older sisters who attended the Friends elementary school when he wrote that "I was tremendously helped by their schooling. Being the first boy after the arrival of seven sisters, I was kind of petted but not spoiled. My sisters did everything for me. They taught me and helped me in every conceivable (sic) way, for which I am very grateful."<sup>14</sup>

Totah's days in the schools of Ramallah were full of books, friends, and at times corporal punishment for the slightest infractions. His 'big break' in his education came, however, in 1899 when his father placed him in the FGS which was the only full-term Friends boarding school in Ramallah at that time. While conscious of his small stature, Khalil was far more aware of his boyishness among all those girls, and he longed to be in a boys' school instead. His wish was fulfilled finally in 1901 when the Friends Boys School (FBS) opened its doors following the arrival of the American Quakers and, in time, Khalil's lifelong friends and mentors, Elihu and Almy Grant, the FBS founders.<sup>15</sup> Khalil had the honour of being FBS' first student.<sup>16</sup>

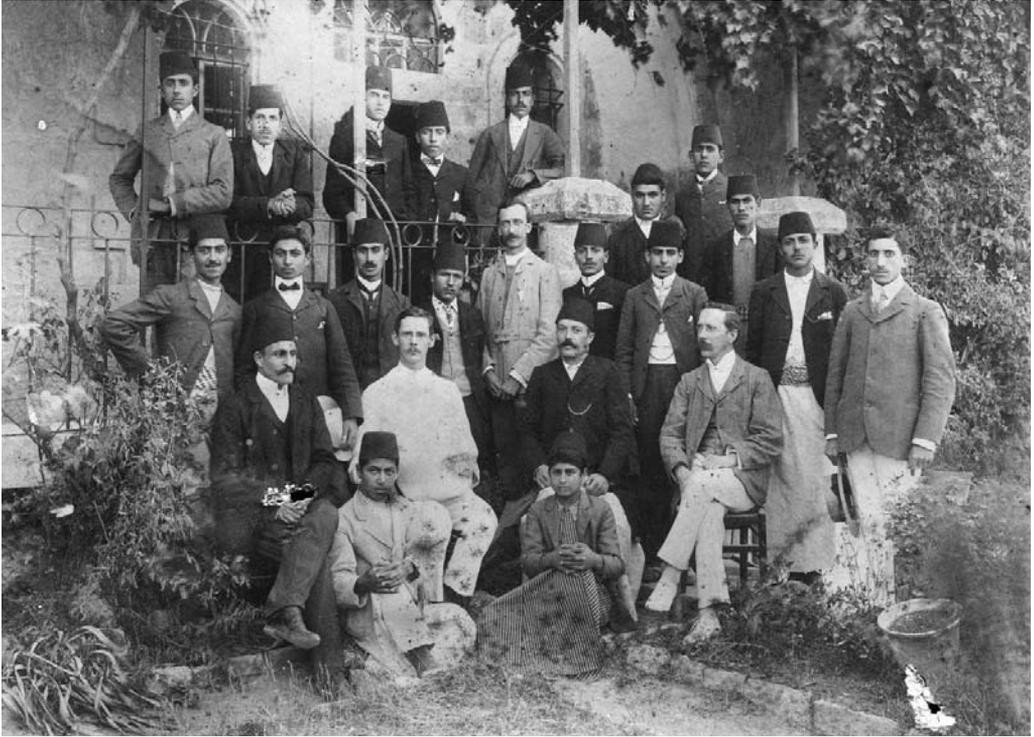
## **Palestinian School Days, American College Years, 1901 to 1919**

At 15 years of age, Totah began the second phase of his life as an intellectual, scholar, and academic administrator with his entry into FBS. The move from the girls to the boys' school marked an important advance in both his intellectual, linguistic, and social skills; a maturation that continued for the next eighteen years. He began a

process of careful study habits, continuous reading of classics, and great advances in his speaking, reading and writing of English. He was to experience a number of critical 'self tests' in the process beginning with his two years at FBS (1901-03), and then his stay in Lebanon at the Brummana Friends School (1903-04) followed by his last year of Palestinian schooling in Jerusalem at the recently established Church Mission Society (CMS) English School in 1904-05. By this time, he had become quite conscious of his Palestinian Arab of his Christian upbringing and Ottoman Syrian heritage.

As was the case with many other outstanding Palestinian boys and girls who attended the Ramallah Friends Schools, Totah was hired in 1905 as a teacher of English for one year. His journal made clear his disappointment with further delays in completing his education however. Nonetheless, a paying job met his dire need for monies once more while he waited for his travel papers to continue his studies in the United States.<sup>17</sup> His first sea voyage to the United States in the summer of 1906 took him to Oak Grove Friends Seminary in Vassalboro, Maine with the continued friendship and support of Eli and Almy Grant. After two years of preparatory work and an American high school diploma, Totah was soon accepted to continue his studies and his first college degree from Clark College in Worcester, Massachusetts (1908-11).

In the course of all his 'firsts', Totah's main concerns were always focused on finding schools for his self-improvement, funding his room, board and tuition costs, learning American ways, enjoying an active social life, and finally thinking of ways of advancing a better American understanding of Palestine and the Arab world. The search for monies to pay his daily, weekly and monthly bills was an obsession with him. His dream of attending Haverford College in Haverford, Pennsylvania in 1908 was not fulfilled due primarily to his lack of monies and missing out on a full scholarship; he was listed only as a prospective student. Without a scholarship, Haverford remained beyond his reach. Instead, he chose Clark College in Worcester, Massachusetts, due to a partial scholarship and at the urgent request of the Friends community in Worcester. His diaries made it abundantly clear that he worked daily in a range of odd jobs including washing dishes, mowing lawns, and cleaning houses in order to sustain himself for the three years of studies at Clark College. In addition to the day jobs, Totah enrolled as an evening schoolteacher of English for Arabic-speaking immigrants. His 1909-11 summers were spent first working in an envelope factory near Worcester, MA before he discovered his talents as a travelling salesman, peddling aluminium kitchen products throughout the New England, and then in central Indiana. So successful was he in the aluminium kitchen ware business that he was able to drop all his former day and night jobs, and spend his senior year at Clark in relative leisure spending all his time on his studies and extracurricular social activities. Totah learned the economic benefits of successful capitalism, and for the first time in his life, he was economically independent.



The 1905 English College, Jerusalem. Khalil Totah is the 4<sup>th</sup> from the right. *Source: T. Ricks*



The 1911 Clark College, Worcester MA Men's Choral Society. Khalil Totah is 4<sup>th</sup> from the right, second row. *Source: T. Ricks*

While his self-confidence soared with the thrill of social and economic independence, he turned his attention to his intellectual development. In the fall of 1911, his extremely successful summer aluminium sales paid handsomely for his year's room and board while he focused completely on his studies for his Master Degree in Education at Columbia University's Teachers College. Within in the year, he finished his courses and wrote his thesis "Friends Secondary Schools in America," and returned to Palestine in 1912.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, his unpublished *Journal* and the diaries made clear that the 1901 to 1919 period was filled with much anxiety about "fitting" into college and American life. As he continued to improve his near-native proficiency in English excelling in history and literature classes at Clark College, he also developed a close circle of friends, joined in dramatic productions and the Clark College men's choral society, and succeeded enormously in his summer peddling trade of aluminium kitchenware. Khalil found, in fact, that it was relatively easy for him to warm up to others and to enjoy their company. He also began during these years to demonstrate meaningful and lifetime relationships with American men and women both on and off campus. Indeed, he acknowledged having spotted his first true love and future wife, Ermina Jones, only on his third day at Oak Grove School in Vassalboro, Maine in 1906. In 1915, as a layman at the Providence, Rhode Island Yearly Meeting, he and Ermina finally decided to get married since "we had been engaged long enough and our best judgment favoured our marriage and settling in Central Village [Massachusetts]."<sup>19</sup> The wedding, ten years after they had first met, was on 11 May, 1916 on a sunny day in South China, Maine. It was the same American town Totah had felt he could call 'home' ten years earlier.

Between 1916 and 1919, Khalil and Ermina taught a wide range of subjects to pre-high school students. Then, in 1918, he was caught up in the noisy and widespread patriotism of World War I, and decided to enlist in the U.S. military. While it was the second time for Totah to don a military uniform, he had volunteered to do so this time, and by choice entered as a non-combatant. First he had to get a passport and since France controlled Lebanon and Syria, he sought out the French consul general in New York for his travel documents. Serving in France as a YMCA service director, Totah's two diaries of his 'wartime experiences' in France are filled with warm comments, youthful admiration, and momentary sorrows with the men of the 79<sup>th</sup> Division of the US Army. Overall, Totah survived his World War I combat duty rather well, improving his French immensely and gaining new perspectives on himself and his career in wartime Paris. It seemed that he was conscious that his life had yet to begin. By 1919, Ermina and Khalil had sailed back to Palestine and he began his longest stay in Palestine first as an educational administrator and teacher in Jerusalem (1919-25), and then a principal in Ramallah (1926-44).<sup>20</sup>

As a young, inexperienced Palestinian, Totah had left Palestine in 1906 at the age of 20. Although he had returned in 1912 to be the principal of FBS in Ramallah for two

years, his World War I overseas stay in both the United States and France had changed him. Now, when he returned in 1919, he was 33 years old, had three American diplomas including Oak Grove Seminary, Clark College, and Columbia University in addition to his six years as a principal and then teacher in both Palestine and in the US. Indeed, by 1919, both Totah and Palestine had changed; he in terms of his “new world” experiences, social maturation, and intellectual growth, and Palestine in terms of the newly-established British Mandate and colonial occupation, the vigorous state building activities of the European Zionist colonialist, and the boom in the economic and social life of urban Palestine. He was ‘a new man’ determined to contribute to Post-World War I Palestine’s schools, to the intellectual life of Jerusalem and Ramallah, and to the creation of a post-Ottoman independent Palestinian state. In that regard, Khalil was no different than many Palestinian intellectuals whose patriotic aspirations and national values were worn on their sleeves. They were proud and excited by the prospects of a New Palestine.

Totah did differ, however, in two ways from his intellectual and academic contemporaries. First, he had come from a humble and poor rural family whereas many of his colleagues in Palestinian education were members of Palestine’s elite landowning or commercial class. With the local and global Quaker network and support, however, he impressed nearly all he met both for his intellectual drive and easygoing manners. In a sense, Totah’s early struggles for achievement and recognition served him well in his career where he pioneered education in Palestine based partially on his learned experiences in the US and partially on his own intuition. Secondly, unlike so many of his contemporaries, he spent nearly half of his adult life overseas. In the US, he was just another immigrant struggling and making good by his own hard work and intellectual drive. All those social, economic and political experiences of Totah transformed him into a Palestinian ‘Yankee’ with all those values and aspirations of white, middle-class America. However, on his return to Palestine, he was once more the Palestinian Quaker from Ramallah without a privileged or aristocratic background and its accompanying political clout, landed wealth, and social prestige. In a sense, when he returned “home” to Palestine, it was as if he had to start over again proving himself to countrymen. Given his extended absence in pre-World War I and the early days of British colonial occupation of Palestine, he was no doubt a good candidate for the Government Arab College without familial allegiances and bedrock nationalist antipathies to British colonial rule. He soon enough overcame both characteristics in the process of carrying out his headmaster’s tasks in Jerusalem.

## **Director, Educator and Advocate for Palestine, 1919 to 1944**

The 30 years of British occupation (1918-48) over Palestine had been both traumatic and transforming years for Totah and for Palestinians. Although he certainly could not have anticipated the extensive violence of Jewish, British, and to some extent

Palestinian village forces, nor the painful collapse of Palestinian leadership and brutal banishment of Palestinian rural and urban peoples from their homes, orchards and lands, his earlier dedication to his studies, his spirituality, and his social and cultural relationships served him well in facing those tumultuous Mandate years. It is possible to say that Totah used nearly every persuasive fibre in his intellectual being to help bring about the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. The remarkable failure of Palestine's elites, the sudden Diaspora of 750,000 Palestinians, and rapid collapse of any resistance to the overwhelming numbers of the Jewish regular and irregular forces remained an enigma for him to the end of his days.

As far Totah was concerned, however, the year 1919 was both one of national disappointment and, at the same time, one of personal success. It was in 1919 that the Mandate or colonial British government began by temporarily occupying the Catholic German Schmidt's Girls School across from the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. It was also the year that Totah was first appointed assistant principal and shortly thereafter principal of one of Britain's elite teacher trainer schools in Palestine.<sup>21</sup> Armed with his M.A. from Columbia University's Teacher College, 12 years of living and working in the US, and one year of military YMCA service in wartime France, Totah and Ermina settled into their Jerusalem home as Khalil began his administrative work at the *Dar al-Mu'allimin* or Men's Elementary Training College (MTC) off Zahra Street in East Jerusalem for the next six years (1919-1925). Khalil Sakakini, the eminent Arabist and intellectual was the first designated principal of the MTC in 1919. He resigned his post, however, soon after the appointment of Sir Herbert Samuel as the first High Commissioner of the Palestine Mandate (1920-1925)<sup>22</sup>; Sakakini was protesting the appointment of a Jewish colonial administrator well known for his pro-zionist views. Totah was then appointed to take over from Sakakini; the latter was re-assigned to the position of Inspector of Schools.<sup>23</sup>

The six years at the MTC were filled with a range of challenges that Khalil handled with grace and resolve. The British Director of the Department of Education, Humphrey Bowman, made periodic visits to the MTC, approved all hiring of faculty and adoption of classroom textbooks, and reviewed all entering candidates chosen from the very best 9<sup>th</sup> level students from all over Palestine. In addition to the pressure from Humphrey Bowman and his British staff to maintain a high level of academic and disciplinary standards, Khalil was continually being sought out by parents, friends of parents, and town and village officials far and wide for possible inclusion of their favorite student candidate. In addition, it appeared that "he was strongly opposed by some leading Moslems in Jerusalem as they were determined that a Moslem should be the head of the institution."<sup>24</sup> Lastly, Khalil and the MTC faculty underwent annual evaluations as part of the annual Mandate report.

His undoing in time, however, came not from the usual pressures of administrating one of the Mandate's leading educational institutions. In the spring of 1925, a number



Khalil Totah and the “Old Boys” (former Friends Boys School students) at American University of Beirut, 1925. *Source: T. Ricks*

of the MTC students and some of the faculty participated in a series of anti-British and anti-Balfour demonstrations, and student strikes that had erupted all over Palestine between 25 March and 1 April 1925. During that time, Lord Arthur Balfour of the infamous ‘Balfour Declaration’ had arrived in Palestine to attend several ceremonies including the opening of Hebrew University on Mt. Scopus on April 1st. It was always difficult for Totah and other principals in Palestine to restrain the students and faculty from closing the schools and going on strike on the annual Balfour Day on 2 November; the day in 1917 when the infamous Balfour Declaration was declared recognizing the Zionists’ aspiration for a ‘Jewish homeland’ in Palestine. Ever since, Palestinian nationalist fervour ran especially high on that particular day. The arrival of Balfour in the last week of March 1925 was just as volatile.<sup>25</sup> According to Totah, Palestinians did not permit the former prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of Britain to visit the Haram ash-Sharif, Al-Aqsa Mosque or Dome of the Rock. Indeed, demonstrations and violence had “reached such a pitch against him” in neighbouring Damascus and Beirut when Balfour had visited Lebanon and Syria that Balfour was literally smuggled out of Beirut’s harbour for his own safety.<sup>26</sup>

The MTC students and some faculty did indeed go on strike against the firm and explicit orders of Totah and Humphrey Bowman, Director of the Mandate’s Department of Education ultimately costing Khalil his job.<sup>27</sup> In his “*Autobiographical*

*Statement*”, Totah explained the problem he had with the British Mandatory authorities and the activism of the Palestinian students at the British-funded MTC:

*Schools in Palestine went on strike. In fact, November 2, which is Arabs have, always observed Balfour Day, as a strike day. My students and some of my teachers struck and urged me to join them. My attitude to Arab strikes, which are too frequent and usually futile, was negative. I preached strenuous toil for the Arabs and not strikes, if they wished to stand up to the Zionists. I told them that every day’s loss of work was permitting the Jews to get ahead of them by just that much. I would not join in the noisy mob in the streets or march with the demonstration.*<sup>28</sup>

Totah went on in ‘biblical’ terms explaining how the Mandatory authorities made short shrift of his opposition to the strike:

*The mob was after my scalp as a traitor to the Arab Cause. Like Pontius Pilate, the British authorities let me down in order to appease the crowd who cried, “crucify him, crucify him!” That was my reward for sticking to my principles, for faithfulness to real Arab interests and incidentally for loyalty to Government orders which were issued to its officers in writing forbidding the strike. But of course, that was not an unusual performance on the part of the British politicians or politicians of any other country either.*<sup>29</sup>

Khalil and Ermina left Palestine in the summer of 1925 arriving in New York where Totah enrolled in Columbia University’s Teacher College to begin his graduate work towards a doctoral degree.<sup>30</sup> Ermina, in the meantime, returned to teaching elementary school in Central Village, Massachusetts visiting Totah on his holidays from graduate studies at Columbia. By the fall of 1926, he had completed his Ph.D. with the successful acceptance of his dissertation on “The Contribution of Arabs to Education.”<sup>31</sup> With the doctoral degree in hand, Khalil returned to Palestine seeking a position in higher education without success. Willard Jones, then the Principal of FBS (1922 to 1927) offered Khalil and Ermina teaching positions in the FBS in Ramallah for the fall term. By the spring of 1927, however, Jones had become convinced that the time had finally arrived for Palestinian and not American leadership in the Ramallah schools, and, after gaining the approval of the Board of Missions and the Richmond Meeting, Jones resigned on the “condition that Khalil Totah be appointed in his stead.”<sup>32</sup> to begin his longest educational role as principal of the Ramallah Friends Boys’ School. In more than one sense, he had finally ‘come home’.<sup>33</sup>

The Friends Boys’ School (FBS), originally known as the Boys’ Training Home, was founded in 1901 across the road from the FGS (first named Girls’ Training Home) before moving into new buildings at the western end of Ramallah on the Nablus Road in the village of Bireh in 1909. FBS remains in the same location to this day.

The “new” building and the nearby Grant Hall had been completed and named after the American Quakers, Elihu and Almy Grant. Indeed the Grants had greeted Khalil and Ermina on their arrival in Bireh in 1927. Grant Hall eventually became the family home of the principal as well as a meeting place for faculty and guesthouse for visitors. The open surrounding fields were gradually divided into plots as the FBS soccer field, a vineyard, and a basketball plus tennis court. It was during Khalil’s tenure that the soccer field and courts were put into place as well as the construction of the fine stonewall around the entire five acres of land. Across the road, the patriarchal American Quaker, Timothy Hussey, had the foresight in 1901 to purchase an additional three acres of land on the hillside as a protective measure to the FBS tract.<sup>34</sup> By 1927, then, another residence was built on Hussey’s property from monies raised by the New England Yearly Meeting and called the Swift House in honour of a leading Quaker Massachusetts family. Totah’s then long-term administrative role at FBS meant he had a prominent place among the Ramallah Friends community as the return of ‘a favourite son’ enhanced the Totah family’s social and political status overall. It also put new pressures on both Khalil and Ermina as they both adjusted to the high profile position in a community smaller than Jerusalem and more likely given to local politics and community gossip.

While Khalil took on the new position with enthusiasm, Ermina soon began to show signs of stress and depression due, it seemed, to her new role in the Friends community and the Totahs’ 11-year childless marriage. In the traditional society of Palestine, the onus of high standards and implicit blame for the absence of children were usually thrust upon the wife. By the spring of 1928, Khalil saw a noticeable worsening of Ermina’s depression. At his suggestion, she went with another teacher, Alice Jones, to Italy for a brief February to early April holiday.<sup>35</sup> On returning, her depression deepened and her health declined. At about 2:30 in the morning of April 5<sup>th</sup>, Ermina, having taken a straight razor to cutting her wrist, called to another teacher next door to her. Katherine Haviland, a fellow Quaker teacher, realizing the gravity of matters immediately called out for help waking up Totah and others who arrived too late to save Ermina. She died in Totah’s arms.<sup>36</sup>

The event was profoundly tragic for Khalil, and he sought the comfort of Rufus Jones among others.<sup>37</sup> For the Ramallah Friends community, Ermina’s death was also deeply disturbing – both for Ermina who was widely beloved and for Khalil. His remarriage to Eva Rae Marshall in the following May of 1929, despite being discrete and very low key, nonetheless raised a few eyebrows. Eva was in her second year as an American Quaker teaching at the Friends Girls’ School. The tragic passing of Ermina and the marriage to Eva was, as one can imagine, on people’s minds for a very long time.

Nineteen twenty-nine was the year of the Great Depression in capitalist Europe and the US. In Palestine, it was the year of the Western (Wailing) Wall riots set off by

a series of bloody confrontations provoked by aggressive Jewish students over the question of who controlled the Wailing Wall. The riots and subsequent events over the next two years were a watershed in Palestinian-Jewish-British relations. The riots were also a tipping point for Palestinians in a shift from peaceful street demonstrations to violent and non-violent forms of resistance to the British occupation, Jewish immigration, and unresolved Palestinian demands.

Violent and non-violent resistance to the British Mandate was on the rise. In 1932, Totah was invited along with Harry Viteles to co-author a special edition of *The Annals* (No. 2545, November 1932), a publication of the Philadelphia-based American Academy of Political and Social Science on “Palestine: A Decade of Development.” Khalil was asked to seek out and edit contributions by Palestinian and other Arab authors; he himself wrote the article on “Education in Palestine” noting the political problems of British colonial rule:

*The Arabs of Palestine are quite emphatic in their criticism of the [Mandate’s] Department of Education. They contend that it is “foreign” and therefore hostile to their political aspirations. They argue that the general policy of Government education is to bring up a generation which is to be docile and subservient to imperialism and its chief attendant evil, Zionism. More than once have the Arabs of Palestine demanded the control of this most pivotal department, but without success. The Government knows only too well that if the schools were in Arab hands they would become hotbeds of antagonism to the British policy, the Balfour Declaration, and perhaps the existence of the Mandate itself.*<sup>38</sup>

In 1934, Totah from FBS, and a British Quaker, Daniel Oliver, from the Friends Brummana School outside of Beirut, Lebanon were delegated by the Friends Yearly Meeting of Syria and Palestine to travel to Britain to the London Yearly Meeting of Friends to discuss the “question of Palestine.”<sup>39</sup> Despite extended discussions with Quaker colleagues, appointments with the Colonial Minister at Whitehall, with many members of Parliament, and other leading British persons, Khalil concluded that: “We accomplished nothing. England, including the English Quakers, were so sympathetic with the Zionists viewpoint, that our visit made no impression.”<sup>40</sup>

The Great Strike or Palestinian Uprising from April to October 1936 was a coordinated effort by Palestinian notables to confront the British Mandate on the one hand while opposing the Zionist immigration and land seizure policies through a general boycott of British and Zionist products on the other. In November 1936, another British Royal Commission arrived in Palestine now under the leadership of Lord Robert Peel to hold hearings and collect evidence concerning the viability of the Mandate and possible recommendations for change. In January 1937, Khalil was invited to appear to give testimony about the educational system of the Mandate, its

strengths and weaknesses. He later confirmed that “my statement before Lord Peel and his colleagues declared that the Arabs of Palestine were entitled to their own country of which population they constituted the overwhelming majority.”<sup>41</sup> He did argue before the Royal Commission that:

*The major grievance of the [Palestinian] Arabs as regards education is that they have no control over it. It is the right of every self-respecting community to control its own education...Arabs feel strongly that they are competent to manage their own education. They feel they have as much right to control the education of their children as the Iraqis have, as the Trans-Jordanians have.*<sup>42</sup>

Totalah made four points before the nine British-member Commission. To begin with, he argued that Palestinians had no control over the education of their children including no control over the books, courses, subject matter, maps, and equipment used by the 24 percent of school age Palestinian boys and girls in government schools, or even over the education budget, block grants, and scholarship. Secondly, due to the colonial infrastructure of the British Mandate, it was nearly impossible to carry out a sound and beneficial Palestinian educational programs in the government schools Thirdly, over the past 19 years of the Mandate (1918-37), illiteracy ran at 80 percent for Palestinians as a whole, and 75 percent for Palestinian children never made it to a school or classroom. Finally, Totalah reported that while the Palestinian peasantry constituted nearly 66 percent of the Arab population of Palestine, they rarely received any social, economic or cultural benefits from the Mandate which Khalil characterized as “shameful neglect.”<sup>43</sup>

Totalah offered examples of the lack of Palestinian control over an overly centralized British-operated Department of Education. He pointed out that the annual education reports for Palestine had always been published in English and never in Arabic, that teachers preferred to have more “Arab history taught”, and wanted greater control over all textbooks and curriculum materials. He added the personal note that he had co-authored a book in Arabic on the *History of Palestine* (1920), but that Sir Herbert Samuel, the High Commissioner at the time had “banned the book...because it had a very inoffensive reference to Zionism.”<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the book was still banned some seventeen years later in 1937. Khalil also pointed out to the Royal Commission that Palestinian faculty wanted to have conferences, seminars, and field trips not only in Palestine but also in Trans-Jordan, Syria, and the Lebanese coast, that the schoolmasters wanted more tolerance from the Mandate police during national holidays and demonstrations, such as Balfour Day, and greater flexibility in including music, art and drama as part of a Palestinian cultural component in the primary and secondary curricula. In the end, it was on the issue of rural education that Khalil went the furthest in critiquing Mandate policies at length concerning the insufficient funds for schools, books, teachers’ salaries, scholarships for students, school gardens, and agricultural training for the rural students.

*Very little is being done for village education. It is practically neglected by the Department. The economic conditions of the villagers and the fellaheen have not improved and the Director of Education himself says if the state of the Arab fellah is to be improved, and it is one of the most important problems which face the administration of Palestine his children must be given an education which will help them to avoid falling into the situation in which the present generation finds itself today.<sup>45</sup>*

The rest of Khalil's lengthy testimony explained the inconsistencies in British policies and ultimately the widespread neglect by the Mandate of the Palestinian rural education for girls and boys, the miserliness of the Mandate budget for educational affairs, and the sterile content of the three to four years of primary education that was offered to the 24 percent of Palestinian school children fortunate enough to be in a classroom. Rather than focusing on agricultural education for the rural students and technical education for the urban students, "the Government seems to look on the Arab child as its step child, not as its child in the way in which it spends money on its education. The Palestine Budget for 1935, as everyone knows, is less than five percent of the total estimates."<sup>46</sup>

Over the 1938 to 1944 period, Totah devoted himself continually to his educational and administrative work, his protecting the FBS and other Friends facilities in Ramallah from the rising violence in and around the school in Ramallah, and to his constant concern for his wife, three children and the extended Totah family in Ramallah. Between 1937 and 1939, a series of political and paramilitary clashes between the Mandate forces and Palestinian rural militia resulted in a temporary British military abandonment of Ramallah and the surrounding villages, and an alternating of control of Ramallah and the surrounding districts by four different villages' shaykhs and their armed militias. Their target was liberating Ramallah from British Mandate's political and military control while enhancing their own political and social status within the rural regions. The 'rebel leaders' as they were known to the Ramallah townspeople were both welcomed and feared as the leadership of the Palestinian Uprising of 1936 passed from the merchant and ruling landowning families to urban workers and rural cultivators. The challenge to British authority necessitated an increase in the numbers of British troops and police, and escalated the levels of violence against and by urban and rural Palestinians. Khalil wrote countless letters to authorities, and filled pages of his diaries with the problems caused by the uprising. In a May 11<sup>th</sup> letter to the Palestine Watching Committee at the Friends House, London, he said:

*The fact remains, however, that Palestine has been suffering from a strike for three full weeks and the end does not seem in sight. There was bloodshed and violence at first but fortunately that has mostly subsided. Arab transportation has come to a dead stop. Jewish busses run in convoys and with police escort. School life in Palestine is very seriously disturbed.*

*Most Government schools are closed and so are many Christian Boarding Schools. In Ram-Allah we kept open during the first week of the strike, but the difficulty of obtaining food forced us to send our pupils home. The road from Jerusalem to Galilee is practically deserted except from armoured cars and some police traffic. Jerusalem traffic is very much annoyed by the insistent organization to keep the streets strewn with nails bits of glass etc. The harbour at Jaffa is dead – nothing coming in or going out – while Haifa is open. Trains are running, but the rails have been dynamited, screws loosened, windows smashed and the public feeling made uneasy. On the whole Palestine is anything but normal.<sup>47</sup>*

The response from John H. Robson from the Friends House in London to Totah's expose must have saddened Khalil and his fellow Ramallah Quakers:

*Is it quite fair to speak of the British policy of filling Palestine with Jews[?] After all the Arab population is increasing even more rapidly under British rule than the Jewish, and while probably we all dislike many of the methods which the Jews are adopting, they are certainly bringing prosperity to the country.<sup>48</sup>*

In a handwritten note at the bottom of the letter, Robson adds that the “enclosed cutting from today's *Manchester Guardian* fairly represents the general opinion here” which news clipping was titled “Christian Schools Under Terror – Leading Institutions Closed”:

*Three schools which up till the beginning of this week had been carrying on normally have now been closed down... In Jerusalem the three Christian Schools, Terra Santa College, Bishop Gobat's and St. George's have also closed down. All the three schools suffered from outside interference. Last Thursday week a number of students from the Government Arab College paid an uninvited visit to Terra Santa College at 8 in the morning, but were not allowed to enter. A letter from Arab College students had already found its way into the school but had been successfully confiscated. Similar tactics were adopted towards Bishop Gobat's School and St. George's.<sup>49</sup>*

Nationalist students were not what weighed on Palestinian minds. Nor did the tactics of picketing and harassment comprise the total Palestinian response to British occupying troops and police. The Palestinian armed village militias were limited both in their military operations and in their numbers. While an occasional prolonged gun battle occurred, rebel actions generally involved road blocks, night ambushes, counter orders of the British authorities to opening and closing roads, imposing restrictions on bus and car traffic, and cutting communication lines. While admired for the most part, the collection of taxes, set-up of onsite judicial courts, and ‘borrowing’ of town



Khalil Totah, July 1909, in his summer employ as a kitchenware salesman. *Source: T. Ricks*

equipment such as printing presses or typewriters for manifestos and regulation posters were burdensome for the urban Palestinian generally and irritating to British Crown representatives. On occasion, however, both urban and rural classes succeeded in small victories together. One such victory described by Totah in his diaries was the adoption of the traditional village male headgear of the white scarf and black head rings by all urban and rural males to confound the British orders aimed at arresting the rural men. The peasantry's *kaffiyeh* and *aqal* headgear had distinguished them from the urban middle classes and notables in their Turkish *tarboush* or fez. To the glee of the villagers, judges, doctors, and lawyers of the towns set aside their *tarboush*, and began to wear the peasantry's headgear. They did so, of course, at the request of the rebel leaders.

Armed combat between British and Palestinians rural resisters did occur and were one-sided as a rule though the 'rebels' apparently had access to plenty of firearms and grenades. Furthermore, the British forces and police frequently exercised collective killing of groups

of male villagers in return for the death of a British 'jerry' or officer while randomly detaining great numbers of urban and rural male Palestinians for long periods of time in the infamous Mandate "Colonel Teggart" prisons. Occasionally, mistaken identities and battle-crazed behaviour by young British troops unaccustomed to police work and frequently ignorant of Arabic language or accents of the rural regions ended in tragic clashes for the unarmed civilian population, particularly for the rural population. More than once, Totah sent reports to the commanding British officer in Ramallah and Jerusalem complaining of the ruthless treatment of Palestinian villagers by the regular British forces.

On 8 July 1936, Totah wrote directly to the High Commissioner, Sir Arthur Wauchope, protesting eight separate instances of British military violations of village men and women's rights that took place several kilometres north of Ramallah in the Birzeit

district between 6 and 7 July, 1936. Between that Sunday and Monday, four village men and two boys were shot by British troops with three men and one boy dead, and one man and one boy wounded while riding their mules, sleeping on their threshing floor, fetching water for their families, and tending sheep. The President of the Birzeit Local Council, Peter Aranki, recounted his own Sunday evening encounter with three British soldiers entering his home at 10 PM with revolvers demanding to search a room where his six children laid sleeping. The following day, six women on different locations that morning were sexually manhandled and roughed up by soldiers claiming to be searching for weapons. Khalil summed up the feelings of the villagers towards the British troops when he asked them if they had resisted being searched or not heed the troops' challenge; they insisted "that the shooting was wanton, needless and seemed like sport to the soldiers."<sup>50</sup> On 10 July 1936, the Chief Secretary of the Government of Palestine wrote to Totah saying:

*I am directed by the High Commissioner [Arthur Wauchope] to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> July on the subject of the recent military operations in the Ramallah sub-district. I am to inform you that His Excellency has already directed that full enquiry shall be made in to the statements, which had reached him from other sources, that innocent villagers had been shot by the troops, and the District Commissioner will himself conduct on the 11<sup>th</sup> an enquiry on the spot.<sup>51</sup>*

Such prompt reactions were not the usual responses to military failures during the Palestinian "emergencies". Totah's role in getting matters settled was tested several times over the subsequent five years from demanding that British regulars leave FBS' premises to calling on the help of the U.S. Consul in Jerusalem.

## **New York Debates and California Lectures, 1945 to 1955**

The newly established New York City-based Institute for Arab-American Affairs (IAAA) was looking for a replacement for Dr. Philip Hitti who was on temporary leave from Princeton University as its interim executive director. On 19 September 1945, Dr. Hitti wrote to Khalil offering him a one-year probationary position as executive director noting that:

*You assured us that this is the kind of work you like to do and that you are ready to devote your full time and energy to the realization of those aims and the overcoming of those difficulties...we trust that with your aid the Institute, as an agency of interpreting our people to the Americans and the Americans to our people, will enter upon a new period of success and service.<sup>52</sup>*

Upon learning of the hearings before an Anglo-American Committee on Palestine,

Khalil sent off a letter to Judge Joseph C. Hutcheson, the chairman of the Committee stating that “we wish to submit our views on the Palestine question when you have your hearings in Washington on January 7<sup>th</sup>, 194[6].”<sup>53</sup> On 18 January 1946, Totah presented at length his views on Palestine and the Arab world to the Anglo-American Committee in Washington, DC. His forceful arguments caught the attention of the Arab-American community, but did little to change the minds of the American and British members.

The 1948 and 1949 events in Palestine turned Totah’s world upside down. All his distant and more recent efforts for understanding and compassion for the Palestinian perspective were crushed beginning with the 1947 UN final vote (33 to 13 with 10 abstentions) to partition Palestine into three sectors. Then, the murderous actions of Zionists both Jewish and non-Jewish militias and special forces against Palestinian villagers, townspeople, and pastoralists during the months before and after the British forces withdrawal and the 14 May 1948 self-proclamation of an independent Jewish state furthered shocked him.<sup>54</sup> By the spring of 1949, 78 percent of Mandate Palestine was in Jewish control, and 750,000 Palestinian refugees were scattered over four Arab states, throughout the highlands, or West Bank and in the beaches and orchards of the Gaza Strip. Seventy-five percent of Palestinians began a new and uncertain life in the remaining 22 percent of Mandate Palestine, while Israel signed Armistice agreements with Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Iraq refused to sign a ceasefire agreement with Israel.

The numbing affect of events were bad enough for Totah, but the surprised response of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) to the UN partition vote left Khalil dumbfounded. After long thought, discussion and prayer with Eva, Khalil sent a stinging three-page letter to the Philadelphia-based AFSC headquarters explaining his shock and disbelief that the AFSC supported the November 29<sup>th</sup> U.N. vote:

*The U.N. vote to partition Palestine does not represent the true and free wishes of the member nations. I was present at the session on Wednesday when the first vote was to be taken one nation after another declared itself against partition and when the U.S. delegation realized that partition was doomed, it manoeuvred an adjournment, thus suspending a show down. The next two days – Thanksgiving Day and Friday – were devoted by Truman’s agents to the task of forcing the opponents of partition into submission. Several countries which had voted against partition on Wednesday voted for it on Saturday. Some of these were the Philippines, Liberia, Haiti, and others. The whip cracked was U.S. favors and Marshall Plan aid. The great goal was the approaching election.*<sup>55</sup>

Totah did not stop with that revelation. He went on to argue that the UN maintained

a pro-Zionist position regarding the actions of the Jewish forces towards Jaffa and Akka, on the mounting refugee problem including the Israeli refusal to allow the Palestinian refugees to return to their own homes now inhabited by Jewish refugees, and its inaction against “the immense quantities of munitions shipped to Tel Aviv from Czechoslovakia.”<sup>56</sup> Proud of his Quaker heritage and appalled at the AFSC betrayal of the Religious Society of Friends’ commitments to a peaceful resolution of the Palestine crisis, Khalil delivered one more salvo as it were across the AFSC bow:

*I, as a birth right member of the Society of Friends, descended of Christian ancestry dating back to the days of St. Paul and now American citizen, feel grieved and ashamed of what the United States and the U.N. have done to the Arabs. I wish the Service Committee would be satisfied with the rendering of its Christian service for the Arab refugees without subscribing to U.N. politics. This is a highly controversial political issue and by upholding the U.N. action, Friends are taking the side of the Jews against the Arabs. If we Quakers do not and cannot appreciate the great injustice done to the Arabs, we can at least refrain from taking sides against them. A great crime has been committed against the Arabs. Friends should not uphold the efforts of those who perpetrated it.<sup>57</sup>*

On 13 January 1950, the IAAA Executive Council closed the New York office. Within two weeks, Khalil sent a letter to supporters to announce that “it is with deep regret that I announce to you the suspension of the activities of the Institute... The reason is the lack of financial support.”<sup>58</sup> By June, Khalil and his family had moved from their Maplewood, New Jersey home to a new home in Whittier, California. For the next five years, Whittier College and the Whittier Friends community provided him and his family a familiar social, cultural, and spiritual setting.

In California, Totah set out to accomplish three tasks. Building on the last lecture topic, he began to write the manuscript, “Palestine Illustrates the Bible” which he neither completed nor published. He then travelled to the Middle East for a tour of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank), and Egypt to see what had become of the former Ottoman lands and the region of his birth. Finally, he published a book about the tour fleshing out some broad conclusions about the direction of Post-World War II and Post-Palestine Middle East in his *Dynamite in the Middle East*.<sup>59</sup>

Although Totah always referred to his deep pain and sadness for the 1948-49 Palestinian *nakba*, or catastrophe, he nonetheless maintained an admirable level of optimism based on his own spiritual and social upbringing, and his steadfast belief that the U.S. would eventually see its blunders in the Middle East and correct them. Khalil readily acknowledged the brutal and bitter banishment of 750,000 Palestinian from their homes and lands, the overcrowded towns swollen with refugees, and

the villages-turned-UN refugee-camps. His assimilated American “Yankee-know-how” approach to problem solving gave presentations in Jordan, and the Occupied Territories the kind of “can-do” tenor not found in the writings of other Palestinian writers and intellectuals of the time. One can well ask from where did Khalil draw such bedrock strength? What inspired his long view and perspective on the devastating destruction that the birth of the Jewish State of Israel had wrought on the lives of so many Palestinian Arabs? While there was no doubt that his tour of the former Ottoman Syrian lands moved him deeply in many ways, the careful writing of his brief four months tour that did not go into print for another three years indicated, undoubtedly, that he was still grappling with the Palestinian calamity and what it meant for the Arab world right up to his final days.

On 24 February 1955, Khalil Totah passed away at his residence in Whittier, California, USA. Three days later on February 27<sup>th</sup>, a memorial service was held at the White-Emerson Chapel Service in Whittier, California remembered by more than a hundred people honoring Khalil’s life and contributions. The internment of his ashes occurred two years later in Ramallah where his remains were placed next to Ermina’s gravesite.<sup>60</sup>

Ten years later, in June 1965, Eva Marshall Totah returned to Ramallah to unveil a plaque dedicating the auditorium at the Friends Boys School to the memory of Khalil. In the bulletin of the First Friends Church of Whittier, California, the headline read “Ramallah Building Dedicated to Former [Church] Member,” and the visit by Eva Totah to Ramallah was duly reported. It mentioned that the auditorium was the last of five beautiful buildings at the Friends Schools made possible “by the vision, and efforts in fund raising and building of Khalil Totah” who “was the first pupil at the Boys’ School when Elihu and Almy Grant were sent out by New England Friends to start a Training School for Boys.” The bulletin ended by noting that “it is fitting that Eva Totah should be asked to travel to Ramallah to unveil the plaque, and she will no doubt renew many friendships, as commencement and reunion of former students will be held during her visit.”<sup>61</sup>

The 1950s crises in Arab leadership and the enormous social and economic problems resulting in widespread disparities in income, standards of living and education, and overall quality of life were two themes that recur throughout Khalil’s writings, particularly in his last publication on the Middle East. On the other hand, he was very much a Cold War product of his time in regard to his optimism for an inspired and progressive America, and his obsession with the devious intentions of the Soviet Union. Totah returned time and time again to his hopes for America, France and Britain, and his fears for Soviet Russia. His comments were very much part of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ thinking of the time among middle class America. For him, “such is the picture of the Arab Middle East. It is that of instability, distress, discontent and potential revolution...the infant Arab democratic regimes, have not, so far, been a

howling success...the Arabs are tired of their impotent governments and are clamoring for something better.” Although unsure of the outcomes of revolutions, Khalil argued for close cooperation between the Arab leaders and the United States, France and Britain.

*If these Powers do not come to their senses quickly and reverse their present policies, there is going to be more serious trouble in the Middle East. What the Arab world needs is constructive revolution from within and not from without. The Arabs need a revolution which will be to their own benefit and not to that of Russia. They are in desperate need of a spiritual, moral, economic and political revolution. Perhaps that can come through a benevolent dictator like Mustapha Kamal [of Turkey]. Perhaps democracy has to come by an enlightened despot.<sup>62</sup>*

He was stunned both that his homeland was so “easily” lost, and that the catastrophe had apparently such little impact on subsequent Arab and world events. He was shocked at the levels of poverty and pain that lay at the palace and luxury apartments’ steps. He was astounded at the levels of American ignorance about the Arab world and its contemporary woes. In turn, he was convinced of the essentially good nature of humankind and the power of education in persuading the American public and politicians to change both their attitudes towards Palestinians and the Arab world, and to act upon the good sense of fair play and social justice that any progressive change of hearts and minds might bring. Thoroughly enamoured by American know-how and Yankee pragmatism, Totah was sold on the idea that once the problem of Palestine and the difficulties of the Arab world were made known to Americans, his newly adopted country of the US would spring into action to defend the victims and downtrodden refugees against Zionist aggression and Israeli occupation. It was accurate to say that Khalil Totah like so many other Palestinians could not imagine that once the case of Palestine was clearly presented to Americans, that Americans would turn away uninterested and unconcerned. But, indeed Americans did turn away and showed little concern over the politics of land and water, the centuries-old heritages and traditions, and deep taproot of Palestinian passion, ownership and memories of that place Arabs called ‘Palestine’ and that Americans called ‘the Holy Land’.

The life contributions of Khalil Totah were the three vocations that he consistently pursued from Ottoman Palestine to the American West. He was, in many ways, a very good example of a Christian Palestinian intellectual of his time. Well-read and well-travelled, Khalil was among those few Palestinians with advanced degrees, multiple accomplishments in education, and dual citizenship. He was equally a devote and sincere Christian conscious of traditions and rituals though always questioning their application to the contemporary world of early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Middle East, Europe and America. Finally, he saw himself as a bridge between the Arab ‘Old’ world and the Arab ‘New’ world remaining in both his heart and mind a faithful supporter

and even ardent cheerleader that the Arab world would, in time, find peace and partnership with the US. Totah represented well a man of faith and spiritual conviction who carried principles of fairness and social justice to new levels for those who cared to listen. While at once aloof and alone in his career work driven by habit to withdraw his emotions and to count on his intellect, he was nonetheless an impassioned believer in working with people of all classes, with students at all levels, and with leaders of all kinds. It can be said that Khalil Totah was always interested in including opinions of peoples in the general conversations of the day whether they be political, social, historical or spiritual. Like his beloved mentor, Rufus Jones of Haverford College, Khalil was as much an intellectual and educator as he was an activist and advocate for just social and political causes. Multidimensional and even eclectic in his viewpoints at times, Khalil Totah was an extraordinary example of an Arab Christian Palestinian intellectual fearless in the face of challenges of all kinds that the 20<sup>th</sup> century world had to offer, and always ready to embrace with compassion the sufferings of impoverished peoples whom he met along his life's path.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Khalil Totah, "Autobiographical Statement," unpublished manuscript, n.d., KTC, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Rochelle Davis, "Commemorating Education: Recollections of the Arab College in Jerusalem, 1918-1948," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 23, Nos. 1 & 2 (2003), pp 190-204 is an excellent study of the faculty, students and administrators of the Arab College. Dr. Davis' research into the 1925 events and the Arab College anti-Balfour demonstrations includes insightful observations on Khalil Totah and his subsequent dismissal as the College Principal in June 1925.

<sup>3</sup> The research reported in the article was made possible by grants from the Spencer Foundation (Chicago, Illinois) and the Gest Scholarship (Haverford College, Pennsylvania). The writer is deeply indebted to Joy Totah Hilden for her assistance in gaining access to the papers, letters and diaries of her father, Khalil Totah. The data presented, the statements made, and the views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

<sup>4</sup> The titles of his works in English are: co-editor, *Annals of the Academy of Political and Social Science*, (Philadelphia, PA: 1932); *Arab Progress in Palestine* (1946); *The Contributions of Arabs to Education*, (Piscataway, NJ: 2002); *Dynamite in the Middle East*, (New York, NY: 1955); *Introducing the Arabs to Americans*, (New

York, NY: 1955). His Arabic texts are: *Arab Education; Geography of Palestine; History of Jerusalem; History of Palestine*.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.passia.org/images/personalities/totah-khalil](http://www.passia.org/images/personalities/totah-khalil). Unfortunately, small but important mistakes occur in PASSIA publications. In the recently published *Palestinian Personalities: A Biographical Dictionary*, revised and edited by Mahdi Abdul Hadi (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2006), pp. 201-02 the biographical entry identifies Totah as being born to "Greek Orthodox parents" when indeed his parents were Quakers at the time of his birth. The point that he is a "birth right Quaker" was constantly made by Totah throughout his life writings though Quakers no longer use such a phrase these days as a way of asserting his privileged status to the global Quaker community. Furthermore, the entry errs in the dates of Totah's stay at Clark College which was for two years from 1906 to 1908 and not for the one year as stated in the entry.

<sup>6</sup> While the Richmond Meeting and two of the FGS American missionaries (Rose Lee and Mildred White) published eyewitness accounts of the Ramallah schools, the writings are focused on the "establishment" of the American Friends properties with some information about Katie Gabriel, Alice Jones, the Husseys, Kelseys and Grants, and on "life and times" during the Palestinian Uprising in the late 1930s found in

the publication by Nancy Parker McDowell, *Notes from Ramallah, 1939*, the only secondary sources on Totah's life and activities in Ramallah are the two publications by Christina Jones, the wife of Willard Jones; i.e., her "official history" of the Ramallah schools, *Friends in Palestine*, (Richmond IN: Friends United Press, 1981 and her earlier autobiographical work, *Untempered Wind: Forty Years in Palestine*, (London: Longman, Ltd, 1975)

<sup>7</sup> Totah, *Dynamite*, p. 166.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>9</sup> Khalil Totah, *The Journal of Khalil Totah*, unpublished typed mss., p. 107 in KTC.

<sup>10</sup> Conversation with Dr. Walid Khalidi on March 3, 2007 in his Cambridge MA home in which he confirmed that his father, Dr. Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi, the 3<sup>rd</sup> principal of the MTC from 1925 to 1948 preferred calling the MTC the "Government Arab College" or *Kuliya al-'Arabiyya* both due to its "junior college" status by World War II and in anticipation of plans by the Mandate to establish it as the University of Palestine.

<sup>11</sup> Eli Jones (1807-1890) and Sibyl Jones (1808-1873) both from Maine were initially Quaker missionaries to West Africa and then, from 1867 to 1869, to the Eastern Mediterranean lands of Palestine and Lebanon; they had stopped in Ramallah overnight from Jerusalem when they met the remarkable Mariam educated by the Jerusalem deaconesses at their Talitha Kumi school who demanded support from the Quakers for a girls' school in Ramallah to match a boys' school already in operation. The Joneses were intending to travel onto Lebanon so after promising Mariam their support, they went onto Lebanon and founded the Brummana Friends School in Brummana village overlooking Beirut. While the British Friends took over the establishment in 1869 of a "Girls' Training Home" in Ramallah, the American Friends focused on Brummana, Eli Jones returned to Jerusalem and Ramallah twice in 1876 and 1882, and, after some international negotiations with their British colleagues, agreed to hand over Brummana to the British in exchange for the Ramallah Girls' Training Home in 1889, twenty years after the historic meeting with Mariam.

<sup>12</sup> See the nine volumes of *The Ramallah Messenger* (Providence, RI, Lynn and Northampton, MA) for the 1903-11 periods in the Haverford College Library Archives Quaker Collection in which photos of the Ramallah FGS and FBS graduates, Ramallah local news, and the

frequent mention of Khalil's family and sisters.

<sup>13</sup> Khalil Totah, in *The Ramallah Messenger*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (June, 1905), p. 7

<sup>14</sup> Khalil Totah, "*Journal of Khalil A. Totah*" unpublished manuscript, KTC, 143 pp.

<sup>15</sup> Elihu (1873-1942) and Almy Grant were Quaker missionaries who spent considerable time in Africa and the Middle East assisting in the establishment of mission schools and Christian communities. They were one of the several editors of the New England Yearly Meeting's publication, *The Ramallah Messenger*, established the Boys' Friends School in Ramallah, and remained from 1901 on close friends and mentors of Totah for the remainder of their lives, assisting him in his travels to the US, housed him during vacation breaks, and supported him financially during his early school years in New England.

<sup>16</sup> Willard Jones, Principal, FBS, Ramallah Palestine to Bayard Dodge, President, American University of Beirut Lebanon, 4 June 1926, p. 1, KTC in which Jones states that Khalil "early manifested an eagerness to learn and has studied in our school, at Brummana and the English College in Jerusalem."

<sup>17</sup> See the news items about Khalil's teaching and his plans to travel to Oak Grove, Maine in *The Ramallah Messenger*, Vol. 3, No. 5 (September 1905), pp 2 and 4, and Vol. 3, No. 6 (December 1905), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Totah, "*Journal*," pp. 135-36.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126-27

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>21</sup> Major G. W. Taxmen, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Education/Headquarters, Occupied Enemy Territory Administration (South), Jerusalem to Mr. Khalil Abdallah Totah c/o Military Governor, Ramallah, 19 September 1919, 3 pp. manuscript in KTC where it is mentioned that the Assistant Principal job at the Men's Elementary Training College is offered "on the understanding that you will be made Principal of the College... as soon as that position falls vacant. The present Principal – Khalil Effendi Sakakini will take the appointment of Inspector of Schools as soon as that post is approved."

<sup>22</sup> Davis, "Commemorating Education," p. 193.

<sup>23</sup> Totah's resumé dates his MTC appoint from 1919 to 1925 (KTC). Nicola Ziadeh, "Views on Palestine, Palestinian Educators, and Khalil Totah," in cassette tapes and transcriptions by Joy Totah Hilden, April 12-23, 2003. Tape one, page 3 where Ziadeh stated that "I was at the College

from 1921 to 1924, [when] he [Khalil] became head of that school [MTC]; he took it over late in 1919.”

<sup>24</sup> Willard Jones, Principal, FBS, Ramallah Palestine to Bayard Dodge, President, AUB, Beirut Lebanon, 4 June 1926, p. 1. where Jones commented on Khalil’s qualifications for a position at AUB noting his six years at the MTC where Khalil developed the “College in Jerusalem from practically nothing to a place of outstanding importance in the educational life of Palestine... Totalah stood most loyally by the government but he had two very fiery Moslem nationalists on his staff who created such disturbance that the school had to be closed for a season.”

<sup>25</sup> A confidential memorandum issued by Humphrey Bowman, Director of Education, Jerusalem, 29 March 1925, 3pp. titled “Disorders at M.E.T.C. & C.S.B.S.” was an enquiry which was conducted “into the recent conduct of every individual student at the Men’s Elementary Training College and at the Central Secondary Boarding School in which it was said that four categories of boys could be found: 1. “very active agitators and ringleaders (eight in number),” 2. “lesser agitators (about a dozen),” 3. “those against or for whom nothing is known except that they followed the crowd (the majority),” and 4. “those who are known to have stood out against the majority and o have yield only with reluctance to extreme pressure (three or four).” Given that the MTC and the CSBS probably had no more than 200 total boarders ten percent of whom were either “very active agitators” or “lesser agitators”, the Mandate educators including Khalil had their hands full. The third page of the manuscript (KTC) is missing on which the punishments were probably listed, but the first two pages list multiple names of boys in particular “Mustafa Taher of Jaffa, Form III B half scholar stands in a class by himself as the most openly turbulent and ill disciplined on contact.”

<sup>26</sup> Totalah, “*Autobiographical Statement*,” p. 2, KTC.

<sup>27</sup> Davis, “Commemorating Education,” pp. 193-4 where Davis implies that Khalil’s inability to coax students and some faculty to return to the MTC on June 1<sup>st</sup> that was the final blow to his position as principal. He left MTC later that month.

<sup>28</sup> Totalah, “*Autobiographical Statement*,” p. 2, KTC.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> The confidential memorandum from Max Nurock, Chief Secretary of the Secretary of

State, London UK to Humphrey E. Bowman, Director of Education, 18 March 1925 reply to Bowman’s 3 March 1925 request by Khalil Totalah stated that the Secretary of State “approves of Mr. Totalah being granted leave on half pay from September 1926 to July 1927 to be spend in the United States of America.” 1 pp. marked received on 28 March 1925, manuscript, KTC indicates that Khalil had already planned to take a leave of absence from MTC well ahead of the March-April 1925 demonstrations. In a follow up letter from Khalil Totalah, Men’s Training College, Jerusalem, Palestine to Dr. William F. Russell, [Columbia University] Teachers College, NY dated 1 June 1925, Khalil states that “in reply to your letter of Feb. 12<sup>th</sup> 1925 in which you state that the scholarship of \$1250 will be kept open for me until at least July 1<sup>st</sup> 1925, I would like to take this opportunity to accept it ... I am expecting to leave Palestine sometime in August [1925].”

<sup>31</sup> See Khalil A. Totalah, *The Contribution of the Arabs to Education*, Teachers College, Columbia University Contributions to Education, No. 231, (New York City, NY: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University), 1926; the book was reprinted by Gorgias Press, Piscataway, NJ, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, *Friends in Palestine*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>33</sup> Khalil wrote an article a year later titled “Beacons of Light in the Holy Land,” *The Friend*, (6, December 1928), in which he sets aside some misconceptions of the Friends’ Schools in Ramallah, Palestine such as ideas that they are orphanages, homes for the homeless, unfortunate children with free education while outlining all the positive work of the Girls’ and Boys’ Schools including the fact that the schools are 76 percent “self-supporting” and compare favorably to Haverford, Westtown, Moses Brown, Oakwood and Oak Grove in the US. He also indicated that the total number of boarders and day boy students in 1901 (14) had jumped in 1925 (93) and again in 1928 (140); a remarkable 1000 percent increase in 27 years! Even more remarkable was the 300 total number of boys and girls under Ramallah Quakers’ care in 1928.

<sup>34</sup> Timothy Buffum Hussey (1831-1913) was born into the Friends community in Berwick, Maine, and on succeeded in completing his undergraduate and graduate studies before spending some time in the family business. His expertise in business helped the Friends considerably in buying land and building new schools. He and his wife spent

several years from 1901 to 1910 where the Husseys succeeded the famed founders of the Ramallah Friends community, Eli and Sibyl Jones, as superintendents in Ramallah - *American Friend*, New Series, Vol. 1 (1913), p. 566.

<sup>35</sup> Alice Jones (1873-1960) had attended Oak Grove Friends Seminary and then Wells College and Earlham College. In 1906 to 1929, Alice arrived first as a teacher and then principal of Girls' Training Home in Ramallah. She returned to teach at Oak Grove Friends from 1929-39 before returning once more to Ramallah until the 1941.

<sup>36</sup> A. Willard Jones, Ramallah Palestine to B. Willis Beede, Richmond Indiana, April 7, 1928 in Earlham College, Lilly Library, Quaker Collection, Friends United Meeting – Wider Ministries Records, Friends Microfilm Series, 157, No. 37 [hereafter ECQC]. In addition, a communication from Joy Totah Hilden to this writer quoting from her mother's (Eva Marshall Totah), unpublished autobiography, 15 February 2007.

<sup>37</sup> Khalil wrote to Rufus that Ermina had been "melancholic" since Christmas 1927, that she feared she was failing Khalil by taking time off from teaching or returning to America. He finally wrote that "In a moment of despair she went away" and "There is a great big cavity in my life. The loneliness is crushing...I find much comfort in tears. It may be unmanly but the blow is staggering and there is a limit to what the soul can stand." Khalil Totah, Friends Boys School, Ramallah, Palestine to Rufus M. Jones, Haverford College, Haverford Pennsylvania, 12 April 1928 in the Rufus M. Jones Papers, Box 27, Folder 1130, 1928, *The Quaker Collection*, Magill Library, Haverford College, Haverford, PA. See Christina Jones' account in *Friends in Palestine*, p. 82.

<sup>38</sup> Khalil Totah, "Education in Palestine," *The Annals*, (November, 1932), p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Tanius Cortas, *Minutes of the Syria and Palestine Yearly Meeting of Friends Held at Brummana, Lebanon*, April 4-8, 1934, 1 page. See Khalil Totah, "We Want Rufus Jones," *Friends Intelligencer*, 24 May 1934, n. p. KTC.

<sup>40</sup> Totah, "Autobiographical Statement," p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Palestine Royal Commission*, evidence of Dr. Khalil Totah, KTC, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, supplement to Dr. Totah's evidence, "Arab Grievances regarding Education," 2 pp.

<sup>44</sup> *Palestine Royal Commission*, evidence of Dr. Khalil Totah, KTC, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Khalil Totah, Ramallah, Palestine to Palestine Watching Committee, London UK, 11 May 1936, p. 1, KTC.

<sup>48</sup> John H. Robson, Friends House, London UK to Dr. Khalil Totah, Ram Allah, Palestine, 26 May 1936, 2 pp., KTC

<sup>49</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 26 May 1936, n. p., KTC. In a conversation with Dr. Walid Khalidi, March 3, 2007, Cambridge, MA, Dr. Khalidi refuted the *Manchester Guardian* report in saying "My father would not have put with any students roaming the streets of the Old City, boycotting and harassing students for failure to support the 1936 Great Strike. The *Guardian* must have confused *al-Kuliya al-'Arabiyya* with another Government school such as *al-Rashidiyya*."

<sup>50</sup> Khalil Totah, headmaster, FBS to Sir Arthur Wauchope, High Commissioner for Palestine, 8 July 1936, 3 pp., KTC.

<sup>51</sup> J. Halhorn Hall, Chief Secretary's Office, Jerusalem, 10 July 1936 to Khalil Totah, Headmaster, FBS, Ramallah, 1 p., KTC.

<sup>52</sup> Philip Hitti, New York letter to Dr. Khalil Totah, New York on 19 September 1945, KTC.

<sup>53</sup> 77 Anglo-American Committee on Palestine, Washington DC, 21 December 1945, 1 p., KTC.

<sup>54</sup> General Sir Alan Cunningham (1887-1983), the last High Commissioner of the British Mandate in Palestine, left Palestine on May 14, 1948; the same day that the Jewish State of Israel was announced. Cunningham had led military campaigns in both Ethiopia against the Italians, and in Libya against the Germans during World War II before his appointment as High Commissioner (1945-1948).

<sup>55</sup> Khalil Totah, New York to Clarence Pickett and Henry Cadbury, Philadelphia on 1 April 1949, KTC, p.1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Khalil Totah, New York to "Dear Friends" letter, 26 January 1950 in KTC.

<sup>59</sup> Khalil Totah, *Dynamite in the Middle East*, New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1955.

<sup>60</sup> The information is taken from Joy Totah Hilden, Khalil's daughter.

<sup>61</sup> First Friends of Church of Whittier, CA, *The Living Light*, Vol. 4, No. 22 (May 28, 1965), p. 1, KTC.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 225-26.