

# Waldorf Education in the US and Canada 1928-1979

## Part 1

*Nana Göbel*

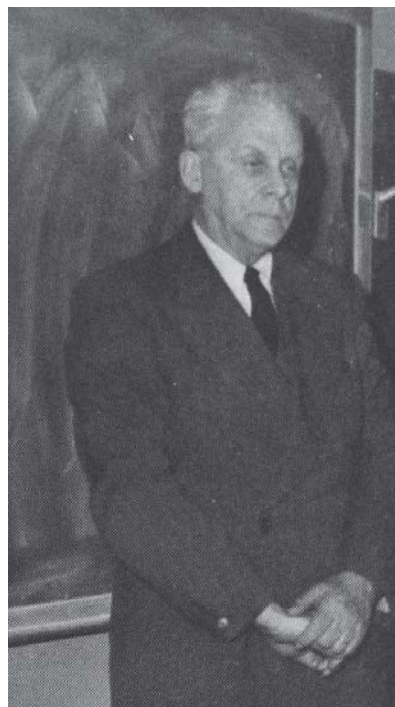
*This chapter is taken from Nana Göbel's forthcoming, three-volume history of Waldorf education, Die Waldorfschule und ihre Menschen Weltweit (The Waldorf School and Its People Worldwide); it was translated into English by Jan Kees Saltet.*

Soon after Waldorf schools were founded in Europe, news about the new education spread to America through the anthroposophical network. The first actual teaching, to my knowledge, took place in Hawaii, at the *Free Kindergarten and Aid Eight Organization* in Honolulu, where Constance Birks-Elliott gave eurythmy courses and worked with indigenous children in the school of Mrs. MH Churchill in Waiialua.<sup>1</sup> She had been sent to California and Hawaii by Marie Steiner in 1925. This means that Birks-Elliott was working with pedagogical eurythmy in the middle of the Pacific Ocean at the same time that Elisabeth Baumann was working on the same task in Stuttgart. There were several people in the USA who were interested in taking steps with the new form of education in whatever way they could. Katherine Wannamaker, an American woman of considerable means, whose daughter was attending the Waldorf school in Stuttgart, met Emil Molt in Stuttgart in 1927,<sup>2</sup> and asked his advice on how to further anthroposophical activity in the United States. It wasn't long before she and her husband were supporting the founding of the Rudolf Steiner School in New York.

### The First American School: Rudolf Steiner

In the autumn of 1928, a circle of anthroposophical friends in New York founded the first Rudolf Steiner school in the United States. Irene Harriet Brown (1881-1934), a cousin of the painter William Scott Pyle and a painter herself, felt an inner responsibility towards Rudolf Steiner. At the recommendation of Marie Steiner, she invited Lucy van der Pals-Neuscheller (1886-1962) and her husband, Leopold Neuscheller (1885-1976), to come to New York in 1923, in order to anchor eurythmy in North America. Ita Wegman suggested to Irene

H. Brown that she should invite a young doctor from Switzerland, Christoph Lindner, to come to New York, and Irene Brown later sponsored the founding of the first small Waldorf school in 1928, helping with both finances and accommodation. A full description of the early development of the school is given in the second chapter of the section on individual school portraits of this book.<sup>3</sup> In 1940, Henry Barnes (1912-2008) became a class teacher at the Rudolf Steiner School in New York. Apart from three years in the military, he served the school until 1977. Like Ernst Weissert in Germany and Francis Edmunds in Great Britain, Barnes played a leading role in shaping Waldorf education on the East Coast of the United States for decades.



*From Stuttgart to NYC: Karl Ege*

William Harrer (1905-1978), an engineer, first taught briefly in Essen, Germany, after which he fled National Socialism and taught at the Kings Langley School in England. He then emigrated to the United States and became a class teacher in New York City. Harrer was later recognized and appreciated for his many years

1 Martina Maria Sam, *Eurythmie. Entstehungsgeschichte und Porträts ihrer Pioniere*, 2014, p. 208f.

2 Sophia Christine Murphy, *The Multifaceted Life of Emil Molt*, 2012, p. 246.

3 Editor's Note: See also Carol Bärtges' essay, "The Rudolf Steiner School at 90: Personal Reflections", in this issue of *Research Bulletin*.

of work in the leadership of the Rudolf Steiner School. Mindful of the circumstances of colleagues in Stuttgart and at other Waldorf schools in Germany, he organized the shipping of food packages from the school in New York during the years 1946/47, and he also sent school supplies to Stuttgart, all of which were thankfully received and highly appreciated.

During the first years after World War II, colleagues and schools, no matter their location, kept in touch and knew what the others were doing, as can be seen from the frequent exchange of letters among them. It wasn't so much a matter of the East Coast being dependent on Europe, as some would have it; there was mutual trust and recognition that they were all working creatively out of the same spirit. As a spokesman for the New York faculty, William Harrer was in touch with his colleagues in Stuttgart; an example of this is the way he collaborated with Erich Schwesbch to make it possible that Henry Barnes and Elizabeth Chambers could participate in the international Waldorf Conference in Stuttgart, which was held from March 31 to April 6 of 1948.

In 1948, the Rudolf Steiner School in New York approached Karl Ege (1899-1973), one of the last members of the Stuttgart faculty to be recruited by Rudolf Steiner, inviting him to come to New York and help build up the high school. Ege came, helped people understand the mandate of self-government and supported the faculty for a long time. It took until 1955 before the teachers at this first American Waldorf school ventured beyond the elementary school, and Karl Ege led the first ninth grade, which ended up graduating four years later as the first class of an American Waldorf school to move through the various grades to high school graduation.



*Teacher, Poet, and Co-Founder of Hawthorne Valley Farm initiatives: Arvia MacKaye Ege*

Ege married Arvia MacKaye in 1950 and remained active in the United States for the next 20 years, supporting the founding of other schools. Amos Franceschelli (1912-1999), a broadly-educated teacher of unbending intellectual integrity, joined the high school faculty to teach mathematics and physics;<sup>4</sup> Nanette Grimm taught biology and chemistry; Christy MacKaye-Barnes literature; and Henry Barnes history. Dorit Winter, who later became the director of teacher training in the Bay Area, experienced this group of teachers first-hand as a student. She graduated from the high school in 1964, and described her teachers as the *Pantheon* of Waldorf educators of North America.<sup>5</sup>



*Unbending intellectual integrity: Amos Franceschelli*

As the school expanded, there wasn't enough room for the high school, so additional quarters had to be found. A friend of the school, Beatrice Straight-Cookson, came forward with a sum of money to be put at the disposal of the school, but they still had to find accommodation.

In the spring of 1955, a building on East 78th Street suddenly came on the market, located only one block away from the East 79th Street school building. Katherine Reeves, the school secretary, barged into Henry Barnes' classroom one day, and called him to the telephone. "Yes, we'll go for it!" was his answer when the person on the other end of the line asked whether the Waldorf

4 Michael Ronall, Portrait of a Waldorf Teacher. Amos Franceschelli. In Memoriam. <http://www.bobnancy.com/waldorf/franceschelli.htm> (site visited 6/30/2018). Amos Franceschelli was married to the sister of Juan Berlin, who built up the Waldorf school movement in Mexico.

5 <http://www.waldorftoday.com/2012/05/the-waldorf-teacher-someone-you-can-steal-horses-with/>.

School wanted to buy the building.<sup>6</sup> The two buildings are being used by the school to this very day.



*Vegetable garden Threefold Farm in 1929*

### American Leadership and Expansion

Starting in 1926, a few farmers had been working on the *Threefold Farm* in Spring Valley, one hour north of New York City, where a large anthroposophical community had settled. In July 1933, Ralph Courtney (1885-1965) organized a conference there, where one of the participants, roughly 40 in number, was the young Henry Barnes, who was almost 21 at the time. He had been invited by Miriam Stockton, the mother of his best friend, Peter. Stockton may have been partially motivated by a cause to lift the young man's spirits, as he was still affected by the death of his best friend, who had taken his own life a year before.<sup>7</sup>

Ralph Courtney, the organizer of the conference, was asked by Rudolf Steiner to work on spreading anthroposophy in America. Charlotte Parker put up the money needed, which was used to buy the estate in Spring Valley. Mrs. Parker also supported the conference by paying for the travel expenses of Maria Röschl, Ernst Lehrs, and Ehrenfried Pfeiffer.

They were the speakers at this first anthroposophical conference in the United States, which was held under a large open tent, put up in front of a small wooded area. Henry Barnes was still inwardly grappling with the suicide of his friend and wondering if it had anything to do with his education at the Lincoln School in New York, a school inspired by John Dewey where the two of them had become friends. He was so taken by the presentations which Maria Röschl and Ernst Lehrs gave about the Waldorf school that the thought came to him to travel to Stuttgart and get to know the Waldorf school first-hand. Barnes took off for Stuttgart, where

he attended the teacher seminar for a year. He subsequently traveled to Dornach in Switzerland and worked for half a year at the Sonnenhof, a curative home in Arlesheim. Both experiences turned out to be essential preparation for his future work in the USA. Before returning, however, he spent four fruitful years at the Michael Hall School in Forest Row, England.

Henry's colleague, Patricia Zay Livingston (1924-2017), was also connected with the Rudolf Steiner School in New York for a long time. Her parents had helped build up the Anthroposophical Society in New York. Together with her siblings, Patty attended the Rudolf Steiner School up to grade eight. Her high school years were spent at the Birch Wathan Girls' School. After doing other work, she trained with Arvia Ege and taught handwork in grades 1-8 at the Rudolf Steiner School. One of her classmates, John Gower Root, who went by the name of Johnny (1925-2014), later taught history in the high school and inspired numerous students with his razor sharp, humorous thoughts. It goes without saying that in later years, Patty sent her own children to the Rudolf Steiner School.



*Trained in Stuttgart and Dornach: Henry Barnes*

Thorn Zay, Patty's younger brother, taught sculpture and handwork at the school; her sister, Sabine Nordoff, taught eurythmy, first in New York and then in High Mowing, after which she went on to found the Green Meadow Steiner School in Spring Valley. Jean Zay, Thorn's wife, her sister, Barbara Francis, and her husband, Keith, all taught at the Rudolf Steiner School, as well. But the school consisted of more than just family members! It was Patricia Zay-Livingstone who developed a handwork curriculum for American schools, which forms the basic outline for handwork teaching in

<sup>6</sup> John M. Barnes, *Henry Barnes – A Constellation of Human Destinies*, 2008, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> John M. Barnes, *Henry Barnes – A Constellation of Human Destinies*, 2008, pp.13ff.



the US till this very day. She had a great deal of patience and her artistry made the students feel inspired. In addition, she took on administrative tasks for a number of years and coordinated teachers conferences. In her characteristically quiet and determined way, she introduced many young colleagues to the foundational principles of Waldorf pedagogy. In her retirement years, she helped the Great Barrington Rudolf Steiner School, where her daughter, Pamela Giles, was a class teacher, and where her brother and his wife had also come to teach in the meantime. Free from classroom obligations, she later also found the time to support Ronald Koetzsch with the publication of *Renewal*, the magazine published by the American Waldorf movement, which she did with an unerring feel for quality. During her retirement years, she was asked to travel and advise new schools and take on the chairmanship of the Pedagogical Section in the United States, a task which she reportedly fulfilled with modesty and wisdom.

During the years that the Waldorf movement grew and expanded, a fruitful exchange took place with colleagues in Europe, which grew even stronger when National Socialism dominated Germany and a number of carrying members of the Waldorf movement emigrated to the United States. In 1934, the Goetheanum organized a two months lecture tour through the United States, in which Günther Wachsmuth, Ehrenfried Pfeiffer and Hermann von Baravalle were the speakers. Hermann von Baravalle (1898-1973) would give a picture of the pedagogical impulse given by Rudolf Steiner, and his lectures were well-received. In 1937, this lecture tour led to an invitation for Hermann von Baravalle to teach at the Edgewood School in Greenwich, Connecticut, which later led to the founding of the High Mowing School by Beulah Emmet (1890-1978).<sup>8</sup>

Around 1939, the St. Hubert's school in Sudbury, Massachusetts, led by Dorothea Huckel, began to work out of the Waldorf impulse, and in 1939 a small school was founded in Maine close to the Canadian border. Elisabeth von Grunelius, who led the first kindergarten on the North American continent, Sophie Porzelt, Hermann von Baravalle, Hermann Poppelbaum and a few others spent time in the United States, some of them for a considerable number of years before they returned to Europe.

In a report about an English pedagogical conference at the Goetheanum, Hermann von Baravalle had this to say about developments in the US:

The Edgewood School in Greenwich, Conn., one of the best-known progressive schools of the country, decided by unanimous acclamation of the faculty on January 3, 1938, to introduce an organic daily schedule, modeled on indications by Rudolf Steiner for Waldorf schools. In the months after it had been introduced, both individual visitors and delegations from other schools came to study how this worked out in practice. Lectures about it were organized, for example, at the faculty meeting of one of the large New York schools, the Brearley School [...]. At Yale University in New Haven, which houses the largest collection of books on Goethe in America, it has become regular practice to add literature from the Goetheanum, seen as the natural continuation of Goethean culture, and at the University of New York, Rudolf Steiner's pedagogy is being introduced in university lectures and workshops.<sup>9</sup>

It seems as if he was pretty proud of this development. In 1939, Erich Schwebisch traveled through the United States and held a series of 70 lectures about Waldorf education. During the 1940s, three more Waldorf schools were founded, thanks to the enthusiasm of Hermann von Baravalle. Inspired by Alarik Myrin (1884-1970) and his wife Mabel Pew Myrin (1889-1972), two highly generous benefactors, the Kimberton Farms School in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, was founded in 1941. In 1942, the High Mowing boarding school in Wilton, New Hampshire, was started under the devoted leadership of Beulah Emmett.



A Founder of Kimberton Farms School: Alarik Myrin

<sup>8</sup> Hermann von Baravalle, *Die Waldorfschularbeit in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika*, N 22, September 1946, p. 151.

<sup>9</sup> Hermann von Baravalle, *Die Waldorfschularbeit in den Vereinigten Staaten von Nordamerika*, N 35, p. 135.

Hermann von Baravalle worked tirelessly, helping with each individual school initiative and, in addition to organizing conferences, made sure universities were equipped with publications appealing to an academic public. One thing was clear: there were not enough qualified teachers. To remedy this situation, he lectured at the *Educational Summer Conference* from August 21 until September 2, 1945, as did Hermann Poppelbaum, Erica von Baravalle, Dorothea Huckel († 1964), and Christoph Lindner, M.D. Also involved were the painter Richard Kroth (1902-1959), who taught at the Kimberton Waldorf School, as well as Ruth (1907-1999) and Hans-Ludwig Pusch (1902-1976).

At the end of World War II, pioneering initiatives of all the fields within Waldorf education had been started in the United States, including a kindergarten at the Kimberton Farms School, elementary school grades in New York and Kimberton, and a high school in High Mowing.<sup>10</sup>

### Post-War Developments

In 1946, the first Waldorf teacher training in the United States started in the education department of Adelphi College. Hermann von Baravalle headed this training, teaching a course about principles and methodology of Waldorf pedagogy.<sup>11</sup> The president of the College and the board members decided to build up an Adelphi College Demonstration School, financed by Alarik Myrin and headed by Hermann von Baravalle, a task which he dutifully took on. This *Waldorf Demonstration School of Adelphi College*, in Garden City, Long Island, NY, opened on September 29, 1940.<sup>12</sup> It was the first Waldorf school that functioned within the framework of a university. Elisabeth von Grunelius taught the kindergarten, Betty van Vliet (née Raab, 1911-1970) eurythmy, and Erica von Baravalle taught the first grade. This marked the start of the fifth Waldorf school in the United States.



*The Eighth Grade, Rudolf Steiner School, NYC, 1960s*

10 Hermann von Baravalle, *Die Entwicklung der Waldorf-Schulbewegung in Amerika*<sup>ek</sup> 9, 1951, p. 311-319.

11 Hermann von Baravalle in a letter of August 2, 1946 to Dr. Erich Schwebsch. Archiv BFWS 5948.

12 Hermann von Baravalle, *Die Eröffnung der „Waldorf Demonstration School“ am Adelphi College, USA*. N 2. November 1947, p. 175f.

A few people had a strong influence on the further development of the Waldorf movement, so much so that their strengths and weaknesses, their character and understanding of Rudolf Steiner's educational lectures shaped the movement to a remarkable degree. For that reason, it is important to know something about them. One important family was the Gardner family.

John Fentress Gardner (1912-1998) saw himself as a writer and pedagogue. His main occupation was as director of *The Waldorf Demonstration School* in Garden City, a task to which he was appointed by the Myrins when Hermann von Baravalle was on a lecture tour of German Waldorf schools for several months in 1951. Under his directorship, the school was to become a Waldorf school for Americans and by Americans.<sup>13</sup> Gray clouds descended, for, sad to say, John Gardner did not work together with either Hermann and Erica von Baravalle or with Elisabeth von Grunelius.<sup>14</sup> The three of them did not want to provoke conflict any further, so they kept silent but knew that this directorship inevitably meant they had to go their separate ways, even though it was they who had started a school they all loved. Starting in 1953, Erica von Baravalle went to teach in another school on Long Island, Elisabeth von Grunelius returned to Europe, and Hermann von Baravalle focused on the teacher training.

Gardner was married to Carol Hemingway, the youngest sister of Ernest Hemingway. After college, he worked in biodynamic agriculture and supervised psychiatric patients. During World War II, he served in the Navy and was stationed in Guam in the West Pacific. When the war was over, he earned his teacher certificate and, as mentioned above, started his educational career at the Waldorf School of Garden City, becoming its director in 1951. In time Gardner built up the school from kindergarten up to grade 12, supported financially in this endeavor by Alarik Myrin. In this capacity, he began working in the teacher training at Adelphi, where, from 1964 until 1978, he led the *Waldorf Institute for Liberal Education*, which became accredited under the auspices of the University in 1967.<sup>15</sup>

This teacher training offered a master's degree. The Garden City School flourished for many years, even though there always was underlying tension with other

13 Douglas Gerwin in an email of 10/8/2015. Gerwin adds, "From the Garden City perspective, the Steiner School in Manhattan was perceived as being overly Euro-centric (a term that did not exist at that time, of course). From the Steiner School perspective, the Garden City school was thought to be insufficiently anthroposophic."

14 Hermann von Baravalle in a letter of 10/20/1951, to Sophie Porzelt. Archiv BFWS 6007/08.

15 Hermann von Baravalle, *Die Entwicklung der Waldorf-Schulbewegung in Amerika*<sup>ek</sup> 9, 1951, p. 311-319.

schools, specifically the Rudolf Steiner School in New York. John F. Gardner and Franz E. Winkler († 1971) built up the Waldorf School of Garden City more and more in contradistinction to the program followed by the Rudolf Steiner School of New York. They took issue with tendencies which they depicted as too German, un-American, or Theosophical. In 1973, Gardner withdrew, but installed a successor and from then on concerned himself only with the *Waldorf Institute for Liberal Education*. In 1976, John F. Gardner, influenced by his former student Richard Walton, turned away from anthroposophy and joined the *Born Again Christian* movement.<sup>16</sup> This influence infiltrated the high school faculty. When the parents noticed this, they managed to get the support of a mediator in a process that resulted in the dismissal of six high school teachers and John Gardner. The school was plunged into a deep crisis and almost had to close its doors. It survived, however, thanks to highly motivated parents.<sup>17</sup>

In September of 1948, representatives from all existing Waldorf schools traveled to the pedagogical summer conference held at the Kimberton Farms School. Ilse (Elisabeth Augusta Maria) Metaxas (1900-1987), who was Hermann von Baravalle's sister, became involved for the first time, even though she had only just arrived in the US in order to teach eurhythm as a professor at Adelphi College. The courses she gave at the conference were inspiring. Later, from 1963 until 1974, she headed the first eurhythm school in the United States. The summer conference was held in collaboration with Kimberton Farms, which was one of the pioneer institutions for biodynamic agriculture in the United States.<sup>18</sup>



Highland Hall School, Los Angeles

<sup>16</sup> As is to be expected, different people give different versions of the story. Many people think Gardner did not turn his back on anthroposophy at all, but was only looking for a way to enable the individual teacher to learn to act out of his or her own spiritual experience.

<sup>17</sup> A thorough presentation of these events is to be found in Stephen K. Sagarin, *The Story of Waldorf Education in the United States: Past, Present, and Future*, 2011, p. 52ff. Sagarin was both a student and a teacher at the Garden City Waldorf School, which is perhaps the reason why he gives ample space to the story.

<sup>18</sup> Hermann von Baravalle, *Die pädagogische Sommertagung in Kimberton, Pennsylvania (USA)*, N 3.10.1948, p. 159f.

## Going West

The next summer, a combined conference took place in Los Angeles and San Francisco, to which more people came as more schools were being founded. First of all, there was the Green Meadow school in Spring Valley, New York, which began in 1950. For a long time, it was one of the few American Waldorf schools that featured organic architecture. It was followed by the founding of the Highland Hall School in Los Angeles, CA, the first Waldorf school on the West Coast. The school had been experimenting since the end of the 1930s with elements of Waldorf pedagogy, but it took till 1955 for the decision to be made to change the entire school into a Waldorf school. Dr. Virginia Sease took part in this transformation, as well as John Brusseau and others. Hermann von Baravalle came back from Europe, where he had been from 1954 until 1958, and joined the Highland Hall School. He began by organizing a public summer course there from June 27 through July 6 of 1958. In the wake of this course, Highland Hall school opened its own teacher training course, shepherded by von Baravalle. After that a summer conference was held each year, followed by – an important addition – a summer school in Highland Hall for children from various schools in the city. Additional land was acquired next to the school on a hill in Northridge, to be used for a high school building and to secure further expansion options. In the course of the school year 1972/73 a few experienced teachers started building up the Waldorf Institute of Southern California there, which worked closely together with the Highland Hall School and continued the work started by Hermann von Baravalle.

In 1959, a Waldorf kindergarten started up in Fair Oaks, Sacramento, CA, and a first grade was added after half a year, in 1960. After the initial years, the Waldorf school of Sacramento moved to a large property situated on the American River, an important region in the history of the settlement of California. The teacher training moved to Sacramento, starting its first course on October 2, 1962. Part of the reason for the move was that there was a large demand there, according to Hermann von Baravalle.<sup>19</sup> Sacramento and Hermann von Baravalle maintained a close relationship. He lived in California between 1958 and 1970, first in Carmichael, then in Sacramento, and after that in North Hollywood. When von Baravalle returned to Germany, in 1970, where he lived alone and in penurious circumstances in Murrhardt and Wiesneck, Franklin G. Kane, Board President of the Sacramento Waldorf School, wrote a letter to Ernst Weißert to offer financial support on

<sup>19</sup> Hermann von Baravalle to Ernst Weißert, 9/8/1961. Archiv BFWS.

behalf of his school, even though the school was being built and had very moderate means.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1960s, the Waldorf school movement moved even further west, reconnecting (consciously or unconsciously) to the very first impulses given by Constance Elliot-Birks. Two kindergarten teachers from Munich, Mrs. Ruoff and Ruth Stepputis, started a kindergarten in Honolulu, Hawaii. The Ho’o Mohala Pua Waldorf School in Honolulu, Hawaii, opened its doors on October 2, 1961, after lengthy preparations by Zena Schuman (1902-1998), Betty C. Wilson († 1998), Eric Wakefield († 1978), Jesse Edwin Whitlow († 1980) and Peter A. Lee (1904-1977). Clorinda and Charles Lucas put up the money for a property in the Niu Valley, which was sparsely populated at the time. The Waldorf school of Honolulu became the starting point, which led to the founding of all subsequent Waldorf schools on the islands of Hawaii.

With the founding of a kindergarten in 1965, the Waldorf School of Detroit became the first pioneer school in the Midwest. The founders were Dr. Rudolf and Amelia Wilhelm. Rudolf Wilhelm, an allergist, who had attended a Waldorf school himself as a child in Germany, had first-hand experience of the advantages of Waldorf education. This formed the background to his efforts to found a school in Detroit, where he had settled. The couple finally succeeded in acquiring a school building, designed by Albert Kahn in the second decade of the 20th century, located in the historical section of town called *Indian Village*, where the Detroit Waldorf School has been housed ever since.

The school has lived through the highly dramatic changes that overcame Detroit in the second half of the 20th century. With the exodus of the middle class from the center of town, the school population changed radically. By instituting special sponsorship programs, the school succeeded in attracting a large number of their Afro-American neighbors, which made it one of the most respected schools in Detroit. With the founding of this school, the US Waldorf school movement had pillars in the West, in the middle of the country, and in the East.

*The second part of this article will appear in the next issue of Research Bulletin.*

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*Nana Göbel's The Waldorf School and Its People Worldwide*

<sup>20</sup> Franklin G. Kane to Ernst Weißert, 9/22/1970. Archiv BFWS.