

## PARTIAL LIST OF PAPERS AT 2016 CONVOCATION

As of September 16, 2016

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### REFLECTIONS ON THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF JAMES LUTHER ADAMS

George Kimmich Beach

Adams's autobiography, *Not Without Dust and Heat*, was published in 1995, a year after his death at age 94. The book includes only half of the 1200 typescript pages that Adams wrote during his last years. During his lifetime many Unitarian Universalists and other religious liberals looked to Adams to write a *magnum opus*, bringing together the major strands of his theological and social ethical thought. It did not happen. As he may have recognized, himself, his life was his *magnum opus*, and his autobiography recounts this personal story through his experience—childhood, education, ministry, teaching, activism, encounters with major figures.

Paradoxically, Adams enjoys an immense reputation among us, but his thought and its contemporary significance remain hazy or unknown. He influenced many through the force of his personality and the lines of inquiry and reflection that he opened. My address highlights stories that came out of his life and times, seen in the context of his work.

Especially those who had little or no personal contact with Adams will gain understanding of “what manner of man” this was and why he remains an enduring influence. His life spanned the 20<sup>th</sup> century and reflects the history of this period, so it is of special interest to both historians and theologians. The address was occasioned by the publication of his autobiography and presented to a small audience, including Adams's sister, Ella, during the UUA General Assembly in Spokane, Washington, not far from his childhood home, in Ritzville.

*Rev. Dr. George Kimmich Beach* – I am a long time member of Collegium, including leadership roles in the past. I am retired from some 40 years in parish ministry, broken only by a 4-year stint in urban ministry (Cleveland, Ohio). I served the UU Church of Arlington, VA for 18 years as Senior Minister. I was project director for the Commission on Appraisal's ground-breaking study, *Interdependence: Renewing Congregational Polity*. I have published several volumes of essays by James Luther Adams, and written several books, including *Questions for the Religious Journey* and *Transforming Liberalism: The Theology of James Luther Adams*. In my home community I am a former member and chair of the Community Services Board, a five-county agency supporting the whole range of social service needs; and currently serve on the Madison County Planning Commission, which deals with many environmental issues.

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### THE MONTANA INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL FOR INDIANS AT RAMONA RANCH

Dana Capasso Stivers

At the 2007 Unitarian Universalist General Assembly the UUA delegates called for the Association to research Unitarian Universalist history in order to “uncover our links and complicity with the genocide of native peoples... and with all types of racial, ethnic, and cultural oppression, past and present, toward the goal of accountability through acknowledgement, apology, repair and reconciliation.” This paper seeks to answer this call by telling the story of the Montana Industrial School for Indians at Ramona Ranch, a Native American industrial boarding school established and

managed by the American Unitarian Association (AUA) on the Crow Reservation from 1886- 1895. The school remains to this today a forgotten piece of American and Unitarian history. It has largely been left out of Unitarian history, Indian boarding school history and writings on the history of Montana and the Crow tribe. A simple Google search of the school's name turns up little results. The goal of this paper is to trace the history of this Unitarian boarding school. It begins by examining nineteenth century Unitarian attitudes towards Native Americans and how these attitudes led Unitarians to establish The Montana Industrial School. It then provides a historical account of the school by drawing largely on the letters left behind by Rev. Henry F. Bond and his wife Pamela, the couple who established the school on behalf of the AUA in conjunction with the Unitarian Committee on Southern and Indian Education and Work. With the exception of an unpublished pamphlet written by Margery Pease in 1986 that serves to briefly outline this Unitarian project, the school's history as it comes through in the Bond's letters remains entirely undocumented and understudied. Finally, this paper will briefly examine where the school has been remembered in major works on Unitarian history while also questioning why the school has been largely forgotten. Ultimately, this paper shows that the nineteenth century Unitarians who worked to establish and manage the Montana Industrial School had good intentions and that they saw their work to be in line with social justice and the other liberal philanthropic causes of their day. Yet, an examination of Unitarian motives and the general management of the school highlight the overwhelming xenophobic tones of the project that worked to assimilate the Crow people, dismantling their culture, through various forms of symbolic violence directed at the Crow people.

*Dana Capasso Stivers* graduated from Yale with her Masters of Divinity in 2014 and holds a BA in Religion from Mount Holyoke College. She is passionate about UU history and theology. She is the ministerial intern at the Universalist Church of West Hartford.

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BRINGING A "GRANDER CIVILIZATION" TO FRONTIER PORTLAND, OREGON:  
UNITARIAN CIVILIZERS AND ANGLO-SAXONISM  
Cindy Cumfer

Unitarian historians find the west fertile ground for the study of Unitarianism in the latter 19th century, particularly with regard to the role of western women in ministry and the west's contribution to the growth of humanism. Scholars have been less concerned with the ways in which western Unitarian theology intertwined Unitarian moral beliefs and the Anglo-Saxonist doctrine of civilization, in which was embedded concepts supporting white racism, classism and gendered roles. Founded in 1866, the First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon was on a frontier site settled in response to the "manifest destiny" imperative of Anglo-Saxonism. First Unitarian offers a case study for how Anglo-Saxonism was woven into Unitarian theology in the west. My paper describes how First Unitarian's theology saw the human community as organically interconnected and societal development as progressive and hierarchical, beginning with a "savage" stage and finally culminating in a stage of advanced "civilization" with education, reason, liberal Christianity, commerce and the arts. The function of comfortable white women was to bring civilization and moral values to their families and communities, a role that licensed their deep involvement in the church and its projects. Portland's Unitarians believed that they were located at the apex of the civilization pyramid and, based on these beliefs, sought to build a "city set on a hill" as a beacon to all. I examine how Rev. Thomas Lamb Eliot, the church's minister, and many of the activist women of the church understood and advanced this theology. First Unitarian's theology contained internal tensions and privileged the values of its educated and successful white congregants in at least four ways: (1) the theology saw

humanity as a “brotherhood,” but denigrated those of other races or “lower” classes by characterizing Native Americans as “savages” and others as “the crowd,” while positioning the wealthy and educated as the natural leaders of society; (2) the church’s work in the community focused on “uplifting” the poor into middle class practices and values and improving “civilization” and generally failed to work with communities of color and the working class on issues of importance to them; (3) the Unitarian belief in an interconnected organic society persuaded Unitarians to seek solutions to social problems that accommodated both sides of an issue, with little awareness of how hierarchical power dynamics could undermine these efforts; and (4) the theology taught that wealth was a return based on one’s contribution to the common pool, which undercut the church’s doctrine of an organic society by rendering invisible the role that others played in the acquisition of white wealth.

*Dr. Cindy Cumfer, J.D., Lewis & Clark Law School (1977); Ph.D. in history, UCLA (2001). Attorney for nonprofit organizations for 37 years (retired); Visiting Assistant Professor of History, Reed College, 2002-04; author of numerous legal and history publications, including *Separate Peoples, One Land*, a history of frontier Tennessee that won the 2007 Award for Best Tennessee History and *Toward the Beloved Community: The First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon, 1865-2015*.*

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INTRODUCING AMERICANS TO THE HUNGARIAN UNITARIAN ARCHIVES IN KOLOSZVAR  
AND UNCOVERING OUR COMMON TRANSYLVANIAN-AMERICAN UNITARIAN HISTORY  
THROUGH INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH,  
MRS. RICHMOND'S AMAZING GIFT"

Claudia Elferdink, MDiv HDS and  
Molnar Lehel, Archivist, Hungarian Unitarian Archives in Transylvania

This workshop will cross many boundaries by turning not West, but East, many time zones into Eastern Europe. This introduction to the Unitarian Archives in Romania invites Americans to look back over four centuries; to go beyond English into Hungarian, German and Latin; and to view a Unitarian polity and practice shaped in the radical reformation and still changing today. The Archives offer original sources to tell the story of this long journey in letters, scholarly papers, artifacts, local church history, and documents including correspondence with American and English Unitarian leaders in the nineteenth and twentieth century upon the formation of their national church offices.

Rev. Elferdink, an American Unitarian Universalist minister who volunteered in the Archives during a 2013 sabbatical, will introduce Rev. Molnar and his work in building and organizing the collection for over two decades. She will include photos of the Archives in the Unitarian Headquarters in Kolozsvár and Rev. Molnar’s work reaching out to local citizens, ministers, churches and scholars.

This workshop is specifically designed for Americans in the hopes of increasing understanding and collaboration between Unitarian scholars, clergy and researchers in Transylvania and America. Using short presentations, power point photographs and video, we will show today’s Archives. Amazingly, with all our differences, American and Transylvanians share many challenges. International collaboration and the Archives’ resources could foster transforming research on 21st century Unitarian growth, spirituality, and perhaps a deeper understanding of who we are. Also highlighted will be our many commonalities and international cooperation.

We will show a new short professional video recently aired by Hungarian religious television in

Transylvania on the Archives in Koloszvar, with English subtitles added for this workshop. The host for the television program is Eva Szabo. This beautiful production is shot in the Archives and includes interviews with Molnar Lehel, the Archivist; the Bishop, Rev. Balint Benczedi Ferenc; Dr. Kovacs Sandor, professor of church history at the Unitarian Seminary, and two visiting researchers from Szeged University in Hungary, Simon Joseph and Szabo Agnes. Also included are views of rare books and manuscripts from the collection.

Included in the workshop will be a brief presentation by Rev. Molnar on the scope and history of the archives collection which began with the 16th century founding of Unitarianism by Ferenc David and continues to today, despite over four centuries of tumult and hard times. It is the story of a minority religion, Unitarianism, with a minority language, Hungarian, which is held together by the faith of its people.

This workshop will highlight challenges, intellectual excitement and relationship-building opportunities of international research collaboration at the Archives. How can English-speaking Americans access these Hungarian language archives? Some English-speaking researchers already have been using the Unitarian Archives. Rev. Elferdink, who does not speak Hungarian, will share her experience volunteering there. She will share how the research collaboration between her and Molnar Lehel on an important 19th century American benefactor, Anna Eddy Richmond, has recently evolved from her 2013 volunteer work in Kolozsvár. Elferdink will describe experiences in same language collaborations and as well as their current Hungarian-English project, *The Unlikely and Groundbreaking American-Transylvanian Gift: Mrs. Anna Eddy Richmond (1810-1882)*. Power point photos will be shown of Kolozsvár, Providence, and main players in the story, key documents from the Archives.

Molnar will describe how the Archives are used by local Unitarian churches and ministers, and regional and international research. Rev. Molnar will explain how centuries of Unitarian exchange between Transylvania and America, the British Isles, Europe and global Unitarians is reflected in this Archives collection. The Archives' mission includes being available to Unitarians, genealogists and theological and historical scholars throughout the world.

Rev. Molnar and Rev. Elferdink will describe what the Archives now offer and possible approaches for international research. Questions will be entertained throughout the workshop and at the end a list of ideas for international research collaboration and contact information will be available.

*Rev. Claudia Elferdink* has published on women ministers in the JUUH and the Transylvanian Unitarian journal, *Keresztesy Magveto*. In a 2013 sabbatical she volunteered in the Hungarian Unitarian Archives in Kolozsvár. There she discovered the revered American benefactor, Anna Eddy Richmond. Rev. Elferdink continues this work via digitized files.

*Rev. Molnár Lehel* has been the Archivist at the Unitarian Headquarters in Kolozsvár since his 1995 theological graduation. Currently he is completing his PhD at Szeged University in Hungary. With his colleague Kovács Sándor, assistant professor at the Protestant Theological Institute, Molnar edited seven books about Unitarian Archive sources

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VITALISM AND THE INTERDEPENDENT WEB OF ALL EXISTENCE:  
ELIHU PALMER'S RADICAL RELIGION IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

## Kirstin Fischer

What would it mean if everything in the universe were made of the same stuff—a singular, shared substance? And what if we could identify the vital power that animates all the tiniest particles of matter? How would this change our understanding of the cosmos and the place of humans in it? These ideas may seem the province of modern-day quantum physics or epigeneticist science, but they had their proponents in the eighteenth century as well. Historians know it as “vitalism,” the idea that a self-activating and mysterious life force infuses all matter and makes it go through its eternal permutations. This presentation introduces the audience to Elihu Palmer (1764-1806), a freethinker based first in Philadelphia and then New York City who made it his life’s work to promote vitalism in the new United States. The ideas he proposed were too iconoclastic for the religious liberals of his day, but the Unitarian Universalist Association would eventually (in 1985) come to embrace the principle of “respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part”—an idea Palmer heartily endorsed almost two centuries prior. I view Palmer as an intellectual forebear of modern-day UUs—one we don’t know nearly enough about but who, like the Transcendentalists who followed him, should be included in our pantheon of intellectual-spiritual ancestors.

Palmer, a former Presbyterian minister himself, developed his cosmology while in conversation with the religious liberals of his day. In 1791, he joined the Universal Society of Philadelphia, a club of some thirty members that met weekly for skeptical discussions about religious orthodoxy. But he found the Universal Society reluctant to challenge orthodox beliefs in public. After all, most Americans subscribed to Protestantism of one sect or another, and many state constitutions had religious tests for public office. In this context, unpopular intellectual experiments risked censure the Society sought to avoid. Palmer preferred forthright candor: he published a newspaper ad announcing his upcoming sermon against the divinity of Christ. On the appointed day, a group of Philadelphia’s faithful prevented Palmer from entering the Universalist Church, and the Universal Society (which deplored Palmer’s public announcement) refused to back him up. Palmer was done with Universalism and turned for inspiration to the anti-clerical deism of Thomas Paine.

Like Paine, Palmer sought to undermine the authority of the Bible as divine revelation. When the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 left Palmer widowed and blind at the age of 29, he turned his efforts to undermining the “superstitions” of all revealed religions. Palmer gave weekly lectures and published a book, *Principles of Nature* (1801), for which he became known as a deist. But deism was only a stepping stone in his intellectual journey. While deists believed in a Creator-God who was both sentient and transcendent in the way of the Christian deity, Palmer went even further. The divine power was immanent in the tiniest particles of matter, Palmer believed, and nothing existed above or beyond the shared material of the universe. The politics of this cosmology were absolutely radical. To put it briefly: if all living beings, human and otherwise, take shape through the endless reconfiguration of fundamentally equal particles that are kept in motion by a singular life force, then no justification of slavery or any social hierarchy based on purportedly natural, essential differences can stand.

Palmer’s efforts form part of the longer story of radical free thought that, with its different names and specific manifestations, runs at least from Spinoza’s monism to the modern-day deep ecology movement. In this view, Palmer was not so much an outlier as part of a much longer transatlantic story, a story in which American Unitarians and Universalists also played a part. Transcendentalism later in the nineteenth century, and also other manifestations of a “religion of nature” that saw the divine at work within the natural world, had a relative in Palmer’s vitalism. As does the seventh principle of modern-day Unitarian-Universalism.

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1“ Our seventh Principle may be our Unitarian Universalist way of coming to fully embrace something greater than ourselves. The interdependent web—expressed as the spirit of life, the ground of all being, the oneness of all existence, the community-forming power, the process of life, the creative force, even God—can help us develop that social understanding of ourselves that we and our culture so desperately need. It is a source of meaning to which we can dedicate our lives.” Rev. Forrest Gilmore, Executive Director of Shalom Community Center, Bloomington, IN (<http://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles/7th>)

*Kirsten Fischer* is an associate professor of history at the University of Minnesota and author of *Suspect Relations: Sex, Race, and Resistance in Colonial North Carolina* (2002). She is currently writing a book on radical free thought in the early Republic. Her publications include "Cosmic Kinship: John Stewart's Sensate Matter in the Early Republic" (<http://www.common-place-archives.org/vol-15/no-03/fischer/>) and an article in the *William and Mary Quarterly* (July 2016). In 2011 she received a University of Minnesota Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education. In 2011/12 she was a Fulbright scholar at the Heidelberg Center for American Studies, University of Heidelberg, Germany.

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### “THE CRUSADE FOR FORGOTTEN SOULS”: MINNESOTA UNITARIANS AND REFORM OF MENTAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE STATE - 1946-1952

Susan Bartlett Foote

In 1948, Minnesota Governor Luther Youngdahl launched his “Crusade for Forgotten Souls” to reform the state’s seven mental institutions housing 11,000 “inmates.” His goal was a modern mental health care system, moving Minnesota from among the worst to the best in the nation.

The untold story is the pivotal role that the Minnesota Unitarians played in this crusade. It began when the social conscience of Minnesota Unitarians awakened to the conditions in mental hospitals in the fall of 1946. At the 59th annual Minnesota Unitarian Conference, inspired by the AUA’s call for “Unitarian Advance,” a group from a handful of churches considered the issue.

Engla Schey, a Norwegian immigrants’ daughter, who had found Humanism at First Unitarian Society, and who had spent years as an attendant in Minnesota institutions, sparked the group’s interest with her stories of the abject conditions inside the walls. Reverend Arthur Foote of Unity Church in Saint Paul, became the Chair of the new Unitarian Committee on Mental Institutions. The Committee voted to study the issue, and recommend action the following year.

As Foote described, thus began: “Arduous climb over the road from anger and protest, through indignant challenge to responsible study and analysis and cooperative sympathetic service was not dreamt of by most of those who took the action.” They met with experts, state leaders, physicians and psychiatrists, visited institutions, studied the public records, and began to develop solutions.

In a dramatic meeting in the fall of 1947, Reverend Foote persuaded the reluctant governor, who feared the consequences of an expose, to take on the issue. They became Youngdahl’s first and often only organizational backer, developed a principled advocacy effort, informed the debate, helped mobilize the public, draft the legislation, and lay the groundwork for a modern mental health system. After the legislation passed, they continued with their “moral obligation” to assist in implementing the plan. The legacy the Unitarians left for Minnesota was profound. They helped create a vision of a humane mental health system and brought the issue out of the shadows and into the light. The impact on the Unitarian community was also important. As Foote noted:

The Committee has brought to many members of Unitarian Churches in Minnesota confidence in a religious demonstration that the principles stated in the pulpit can be

demonstrated in community service, and that a church is not a broadcasting station for ideals for which it considers itself not responsible.

*Susan Foote* is Professor Emerita, University of Minnesota School of Public Health. Professor and Division Head, Health Policy and Management, U of M 1999-2009; Health Policy Consultant, Washington D.C.1992-1999; Associate Professor, University of California, Berkeley Haas School of Business. JD, U. of California, Berkeley School of Law; MA, BA American History, Case Western Reserve U.

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## RADICALS ON THE PRAIRIE: A STORY OF UNIVERSALIST HERESY Performance by Kendyl Gibbons

Rev. Herman Bisbee (1833-1879) was minister of the First Universalist Church of St. Anthony (now Minneapolis) when he was charged with heresy by other Universalist clergy for his support of evolution, women's rights, and racial equality. The story of the congregation's loyalty to him is fascinating and empowering.

*Kendyl Gibbons* is Senior Minister, All Souls UU Church Kansas City 2012 - present; Senior Minister, First Unitarian Society, Minneapolis 1998 - 2012; Minister, DuPage UU Church Naperville, IL 1983-1998; Honorary DD, Meadville/Lombard 2015; D Min, Meadville/Lombard 1980; Co-Dean, Humanist Institute, 2004-2009; Adjunct Faculty, United Theological Seminary Twin Cities, 1998-2012; President, UUMA, 2001-2004; Co-Editor, *Lifting Our Voices*, 2015; Co-Editor, *Humanist Voices in the UUA*, forthcoming Author, *Sources, A UU Cantata*, 2006.

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## SITE-BASED HISTORY PRESENTATION Workshop by Gordon Gibson

Beyond "heritage trips" to Boston for teens, we should embrace the many opportunities to introduce history to all ages with visits to related sites. Heritage trips for adults can be powerful. Civil rights pilgrimages have changed lives. Do you know all the sites your congregation has occupied? At this time I anticipate a brief powerpoint offering some examples of site-based presentation, followed by oral presentation of advantages and limitations of this approach, leading into participatory discussion. Time (and group dynamics) permitting I would hope to include some exploration by each participant of how they might make use of this concept.

*Gordon Gibson*, author of *Southern Witness: Unitarians and Universalists in the Civil Rights Era*, is a past President of the Unitarian Universalist Historical Society. As a co-founder of the Living Legacy Project he has over ten years of experience with the impact of civil rights pilgrimages. He has led both adult and youth heritage trips to the Boston area.

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## CONVERS FRANCIS AND THE CREATION OF MODERN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM Mark W. Harris

Convers Francis, a conservative Transcendentalist and loyal churchman became professor at

Harvard, after serving more than twenty years in the parish ministry. At Harvard, his influence was profound because he taught a majority of the courses, and thus heavily influenced the theological orientation of the next generation of Unitarian ministers, leading to a significant change to a more inclusive faith in the congregations.

Convers Francis is not a well known figure in Unitarian Universalist history. His chief claim to fame comes as the moderator of the Transcendental Club. Over the course of approximately 40 years in the ministry he held two positions of equal duration. In the first as minister of the First Parish of Watertown, he was close friends with many of the Transcendentalists, and yet his views were more traditional than the majority of the radicals, and he was a loyal institutionalist. In 1842 he was appointed Professor of Pastoral Care and Pulpit Eloquence at Harvard Divinity School. During the final twenty odd years of his career he taught a majority of all the courses at the seminary (there were only two professors), and was a chief architect in the theological transition in Unitarianism from a moderate, rational Christianity to a more inclusive, free faith. In the 1830's, 1840's and 1850's Unitarian congregations did not immediately embrace Transcendentalism, but by 1862 when Francis died, a marked change was beginning to take place in a more radical theological direction. As the prime teacher to this new generation of ministers, it is my view that Francis played a more important role in this theological transition within Unitarianism than is generally recognized.

The *Rev. Mark W. Harris* is the minister of First Parish in Watertown, Massachusetts. He is the author of several books and historical articles, including *Elite: Uncovering Classism in Unitarian Universalist History* (Skinner House, 2011), *The A to Z of Unitarian Universalism* (Scarecrow Press, 2009), and the forthcoming *Introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist Traditions*, with Andrea Greenwood (Cambridge Univ. Press, 2011).

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UNITARIAN MISSIONARY WORK AMONG THE  
CHIPPEWAIN MINNESOTA TERRITORY 1855-1856  
Display by Mary Johnson

This display will outline the AUA's "experiment" in establishing a Unitarian mission among the Chippewa. It will also include commentary from Rev. William D'Arcy Haley, minister of the Congregational [Unitarian] Society in Alton Illinois (1853-1856), about his summer spent among the Chippewa in 1855. Sources: QJUA, 1855-1857; *ChristianRegister*, 1855.

*Mary Johnson* is a retired Library Director; Member of the First Unitarian Church of Alton, Illinois since 1978; Author of forthcoming article in *The Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* entitled "William D'arcy Haley as Liberal Minister and Editor in the West."

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THE EVOLVING FRONTIER: HOW THE WEST TRANSFORMED  
UNITARIANISM AND UNIVERSALISM  
Stefan M. Jonasson

Our Unitarian and Universalist heritage in the Upper Midwest was characterized by a frontier spirit from the very beginning –geographically, theologically, and sociologically. Developments in the Western Unitarian Conference, especially Minnesota, were critical in inhibiting the reconciliation of the Congregationalist traditions while shaping the evolution of contemporary Unitarian Universalism.



*Rev. Stefan Jonasson* is a Unitarian Universalist minister from Winnipeg, Manitoba. He served as Director of Growth Strategies for the Unitarian Universalist Association from 2011 to 2015 and Director for Large Congregations from 1999 to 2011. Prior to that, he was the UUA's District Executive for Western Canada and has served small congregations in the Upper Midwest and Canadian prairies. He is currently editor of *Lögberg-Heimskringla*, an Icelandic community newspaper published in Winnipeg. He is a past recipient of the Betty Gorshe Heritage Award for contributions to UU history and the Governor General of Canada's Gold Medal for Academic Excellence.

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## THE FREE RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATION IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING THE WORLD PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS

Richard Kellaway

The annual meeting of the Free Religious Association, held during the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 20th, 1893, may have been the culmination of its twenty six year history. It was not the end. Because Stow Persons, in his history of the organization, stops it there; others have assumed that it then ceased to exist. Not so! It continued until at least 1919. Most of the activity was centered in an annual gathering in Boston during the Unitarian Anniversary Week. Papers were read, acquaintance were renewed or initiated, and there was friendly socializing. This paper will present some of the principal themes addressed, the presenters, and many of the leaders of the organization

While the passing years indicated an organization in gentle decline, its goals and spirit blossomed. Several new interfaith organizations emerged – one of them truly international. Their members were institutions, not just progressive individuals. When the names of the organizers and other leaders are examined, it becomes clear that many of them were associated with the FRA. Because they were created following the Parliament, they will be mentioned in this chronological narrative at the time of their creation.

Rev. Thomas Wentworth Higginson presided over the 1893 opening session and introduced the President, Rev. William J. Potter, who read his paper: THE FREE RELIGIOUS FREE ASSOCIATION, A SKETCH OF ITS HISTORY AND MEANING. It was a reduced version of the address that he had given the previous year at the 25th annual meeting. At the beginning he described the outpouring of religious unity that came in response to Civil War and the needs of the Freedmen who were liberated by it. The war also produced a conviction among Unitarians that they must unite to further their cause. However, because the majority at the 1865 organizing meeting of the National Conference of Unitarians insisted on a Christian creedal preamble, others stepped back. When the first annual meeting of the Conference rejected an entreaty to adopt a more inclusive preamble, a substantial group withdrew and created the Free Religious Association, “a spiritual anti-slavery society”.

He defended the organization against the charge that it always talked but never acted. Yes, it may have been “a voice without a hand”. The same may have been said of Socrates or Emerson. While it may not have acted, its influence for religious freedom had been great - overseas as well as in America. Within its many conventions and other meetings, it has welcomed liberal voices from many faiths and groups.

Perhaps its greatest achievement was in imagining and advocating the process that led to the World Parliament which might be the first step in uniting all the great faiths of the world in one universal religion. The ideal goal: the Religious Federation of the World, or “the free universal, Catholic Church of Humanity.”

*Rev. Richard Kellaway* is a Unitarian Universalist minister. He has presented many papers on liberal religious themes. He has contributed articles to the Unitarian Universalist Biographical Dictionary, and has recently published a two volume biography of Rev. William James Potter, a founder and mainstay of the Free Religious Association.

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THE PARADOX OF THEODORE PARKER:  
TRANSCENDENTALIST, ABOLITIONIST, AND WHITE SUPREMACIST  
Jim Kelley

While Theodore Parker was initially hesitant to fully commit to the anti-slavery cause, he eventually became one of the abolition movement's most vocal and militant leaders. He risked arrest and imprisonment by advocating defiance of federal law, and by hiding fugitive slaves in his home. He ultimately became one of the "Secret Six" financial backers of John Brown's abortive raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry Virginia. Despite his fervent and courageous anti-slavery activities, Parker consistently and firmly believed that the Caucasian race, especially his Anglo-Saxon branch, was inherently superior to all others.

Parker viewed race as a lens that allowed him to explain the historical advance of mankind and civilization, and which permitted him to put his own Anglo-Saxon tribe in the forefront of human progress. He was also very class conscience and used race to establish class boundaries as illustrated by his descriptions of the Celtic Irish, who he considered to be a lower branch of Caucasians. Parker often spoke of slavery as a mortal sin and as a blot on American society. Some scholars have argued that Parker's anti-slavery fervor was strictly self serving and that his only concern was to prevent his Northern Anglo-Saxon society from being contaminated by this sin as the Southern Anglo-Saxons had allowed themselves to be.

While, as a clergyman, Parker was concerned about the morality of society, these scholars failed to recognize the impact that Parker's religious faith had on his convictions. The foundation for his opposition to slavery was Transcendentalism, which stressed the use of reason and intuition to discern truth and which also taught that everyone, including slaves, had inherent human dignity. Parker considered Africans to be a lesser race, but still a member of the human family. Thus to enslave them was a sin. His descriptions of African-Americans were frequently derogatory, but his comments were often expressed in a context that held open the possibility of future growth and advancement. Parker frequently blamed the slaves' lack of racial development on the effects of forced servitude and the lack of exposure to civilization. At the same time, Parker's belief in reason led him to be influenced by contemporary scientific opinions, many of which were attempting to explain racial differences by establishing racial hierarchies. However, he did not accept scientific pronouncements blindly and rejected theories that conflicted with his Transcendentalist belief in the human dignity of all people.

My paper explores the conflict between the two poles of Parker's Transcendentalist beliefs; his faith in reason and science and his conviction that all people had inherent worth and dignity. This conflict led him to become one of America's most outspoken and influential abolitionists while, at the same time, it also allowed him to maintain his belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race.

*Jim Kelly* has been an active UU and member of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta (GA.) since 1990. After a 40 year career in business, he re-entered academia and earned a MA in History from Georgia State University in December, 2015. His thesis was a study of the racialism of Theodore Parker. He has also published a biography of Unitarian Supreme Court Justice Harlod Burton for the Dictionary of Unitarian Universalists Biographies.

<http://uudb.org/articles/haroldhitzburton.html>

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## UU COMMUNITY ARCHIVING

John Leeker

Archives and archivists have historically been perceived as gatekeepers between the historical record and public who want to engage with it. A relatively new branch of archivy that is gaining ground is community archiving. A community archives is not just an archives about a specific community, but one that is enacted with input from and continued involvement of that community. Such archives are typically constructed out of the need and desire to fill an absence in the archives – to in some way remedy the marginalization, misrepresentation, or disregard for a distinct community in documented history. And meeting this goal should be attended to not only relating a community to the world at large, but also attentive to all voices within a community. This means that all community members will be able to locate their identity and experiences within the archive, strengthening their connection to the whole community.

At Meadville Lombard Theological School we are working towards an authentic and accessible community archives that represents the lived experience of Unitarian Universalists. Several special collections are being created to deconstruct a singular face of UU by representing the lives of UUs of color, UU women, Latina/o UUs, and UUs outside the US in this central archival repository of the denomination. The Unitarian Universalist Sankofa Special Collection is the first of this endeavor where processes and standards are being developed in order to meet the challenge of serving this community through preservation and stewardship of its records and material culture, while also highlighting the individual experience of ministers and lay leaders. This paper will address the history of the Sankofa Special Collection and the ways in which we are enacting Unitarian Universalist values and principles through community archiving. We will also explore the tension between archiving norms and theological praxis.

*John Leeker:* Meadville Lombard Archivist; Secretary-Treasurer UU Collegium; Secretary-Treasurer UU Humanist Association

*Sarah Levine:* Meadville Lombard Sankofa Assistant

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## “A DEFINITE PLOT OF SOIL” TOWARDS A UNITARIAN THEOLOGY OF TRADITION

Stephen Lingwood

What is the proper relationship of Unitarian history to Unitarian theology? What is the relevance or authority of the past on the present? In what sense do we claim religious continuity in a non-creedal living tradition that allows the freedom of religious evolution?

In this paper I am writing primarily from a British Unitarian context, but addressing issues relevant to all non-creedal religious communities. I propose that disagreements about identity in non-creedal

communities can be seen more clearly through examining assumptions about tradition.

Unitarians may be uncomfortable with a concept like "tradition." As modern liberals we often operate with Enlightenment assumptions that the present is superior to the past ("progress onwards and upwards forever"). However these (often unexamined) Enlightenment assumptions may be blinding us to the truth of the matter. I want to identify three false assumptions about tradition and in doing so come to a more nuanced and theologically-grounded understanding of tradition.

The first assumption is that tradition is a mechanical copying of the past.

The second assumption is that particularity is wrong, and that we should move beyond all particularities and traditions to a religiously "universalist"<sup>1</sup> or "neutral" position.

The third assumption is that the individual finds truth by rejecting tradition and "thinking for themselves." All these assumptions are false. Tradition is not a mechanical copying of the past, but a process of evolution. As Bryan Stone writes, "A tradition that is alive and "in good order" is never a static, finished or once-for-all achievement but is a dynamic process that is responsive to ever-changing historical circumstances."<sup>2</sup>

Particularity is not immoral, but in fact inevitable. The inescapable insight of contemporary philosophy is that all knowledge is social knowledge and comes through specific cultural and linguistic histories. As the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has asserted, "morality is always to some degree tied to the socially local and particular and that the aspirations of the morality of modernity to a universality freed from all particularity is an illusion."<sup>3</sup> Attempts to operate in a "universalist" way can often be subtly imperialistic, denying our particularity and social position and presenting dangers such as cultural misappropriation.

This insight leads us to the conclusion that the individual or community finds truth not by rejecting tradition, but only through tradition. An understanding of modern science, free of the false assumptions of an Enlightenment individualism, provides a model for this.

A better understanding of the nature of tradition therefore leads us to the following conclusions: that Unitarianism should embrace, not deny, its own particularity; that education and story-telling are necessary spiritual practices to understand our own particularity; that our tradition can change and evolve, but through understanding and embracing the past, not by denying it.

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<sup>1</sup> In this context "universalist" has nothing to do with the theology of Christian universalism or the Universalist tradition in North America.

<sup>2</sup> Stone, B., *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 41

<sup>3</sup> MacIntyre, A., *After Virtue*, Second Edition, (London: Duckworth, 1985)126-127.

*Rev. Stephen Lingwood* is Minister of Bank Street Unitarian Chapel in Bolton, in the UK. He holds degrees from Birmingham University (UK), Manchester University (UK) and Boston University. He is editor of "The Unitarian Life: Voices from the Past and Present" (2008) and has contributed chapters to "Sexuality, Religion and the Sacred: Bisexual, Pansexual and Polysexual Perspectives" (2012) and "Living with Integrity: Unitarian Values and Beliefs in Practice"(2016). He is a chaplain at Bolton University and was instrumental in founding Bolton Street Angels, a ministry to the nightlife in

Bolton town.

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WOMEN'S ORDINATION:  
CHALLENGING THE "STAINED GLASS CEILING" IN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM    Natalie  
Malter

In the fifty-five years following the consolidation of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America, the Unitarian Universalist tradition has been radically transformed by its encounter with a variety of different social movements from Civil Rights to anti-Vietnam organizing to LGBTQ equality and environmentalism. While these movements all shaped the future of the UU tradition, one of the most significant events of the past half-century has been largely unexplored by contemporary historians: the denominational encounter with second wave feminism and the rise of women to positions in denominational leadership, especially ordained ministry.

In tracing the Universalist and Unitarian origins of women's rights, most scholars point to the well-known historical figures of the nineteenth century who blazed the trail for women in ministry. These first wave feminists—Olympia Brown, Celia Burleigh, and Phebe Hanaford among others—are celebrated not only for their courageous assent into ordained ministry but also for their contributions to the Woman's Movement of the 1800s and to causes such as women's suffrage. Often the story of women in UU ministry begins with these historical figures and simply continues into the twentieth and twenty-first century with a sense of inevitability about the rise of women ministers.

However, at the time of the merger in 1961, only twenty-four women were ordained between both the Unitarian and Universalist traditions, and by 1975 that number had only increased to forty-eight. It was not until the late 1970s and 1980s when the numbers of women in UU ministry began to increase exponentially. By 1985 two hundred and three women were ordained, and by 1999 women officially came to comprise half of all UU clergy. This dramatic and rapid transformation of UU ministry cannot simply be traced back as a part of the legacy of Olympia Brown. The UU encounter with the second wave feminist movement altered its ministry forever, and this history must be examined and understood on its own terms.

In this paper, I will investigate the social and cultural conditions of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s that catalyzed the ascension of women into leadership positions within the UUA, comparing this with similar movements with Protestant Christian churches in the United States. In doing so, I will focus primarily on the women pursuing ordained UU ministry, but I will also include women who pursued roles in other avenues of denominational leadership such as UUA moderators and UUA presidential candidates. I will consider the ways in which these women challenged the "stained glass ceiling," which traditionally prevented them from obtaining these leadership positions. I will share the stories of some of these early women leaders through their own voices—through their writings, sermons, and original interviews conducted for this paper. In lifting up these untold stories and considering them in their historical and social contexts, I hope to consider the ways in which UU women have both transcended and remained trapped beneath the "stained glass ceiling."

*Natalie Malter* is a Master of Divinity student at Harvard Divinity School. In her studies Natalie has focused upon the history of religion in the United States and the way in which religion has informed social change movements such as abolitionism, suffrage, and Civil Rights. Natalie is a Co-Editor on a forthcoming anthology of Unitarian Universalist historical primary sources, in which she contributed especially to the material on the late twentieth century rise of LGBTQ equality and second wave feminism in the Unitarian Universalist tradition. In addition to her academic work, Natalie is

currently a Candidate for Unitarian Universalist ministry.

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## UNIVERSALIST SURVIVAL: WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Dan McKanan

When Universalists voted to consolidate with the Unitarians, many feared they might lose their identity. This paper will explore the extent to which those fears were justified by examining articulations of Universalist identity published in the *Leader* during the consolidation debate. For both sides, the essence of Universalism was love. In the years prior to Unitarian Universalist consolidation, Unitarians debated the practical consequences of merger while Universalists contemplated its existential implications. For Unitarians, the primary question was whether merger would accelerate or retard the numerical growth the denomination had been experiencing since the end of World War II; a secondary question was how it would affect the long term trend from liberal Christianity toward religious humanism. Unitarians' answers to these questions determined their feelings about merger, but they rarely worried that their identity as Unitarians would be threatened. By contrast, Universalists worried primarily about Universalist identity, regardless of whether they supported consolidation. Moreover, these worries have never ceased: after the closure of the historically Universalist seminaries and continuing decline in many historically Universalist congregations, many champions of Universalism regard a truly equal partnership of the two traditions as an "unfulfilled dream," as David Bumbaugh put it in a fiftieth anniversary address.

It is not easy to determine whether the worries about Universalist survival were justified, because there is no universally accepted definition of the essential Universalist identity. In my presentation, therefore, I will focus on articulations of Universalist identity published in the *Universalist Leader* "between 1958 and 1961. Most contributors to the merger debate agreed that Universalists had already been neglecting the task of articulating their common identity; in a sense, they sought to prevent the loss of identity by drawing new boundaries around Universalist identity. Interestingly, people on both sides of the debate offered similar answers. Albert Q. Perry, the informal leader of the anti-merger faction, identified among the marks of Universalism its inclusivity, its working-class ethos, and above all its emphasis on love. He wrote that "we believe in love; cosmic love as the creative force and human divine love as the law of life," adding that "the innate and historic mission of the church is to inspire love rather than to dispense truth." Similarly, Gordon McKeeman—who defended the statement of principles agreed to at Syracuse in 1959 and went on to prominent Unitarian Universalist service as president of Starr King School for the Ministry—argued that the core Universalist theology was "ultimate confidence" in "cosmic love as a metaphysic and human love as an ethic." Even though Hosea Ballou and most subsequent Universalists used a rationalist method to express this message, they never abandoned the centrality of the message itself. By contrast, McKeeman claimed, Unitarianism was a religion defined by its method.

Perry's and McKeeman's way of articulating Universalist uniqueness was not identical to previous attempts, but it was historically grounded. Earlier Universalists, from Gerard Winstanley and Jane Leade to Quillen Shinn and Clarence Skinner, had in fact invoked love—both the word and the concept—more frequently than their Unitarian counterparts. And, as it happened, the word "love" rarely appeared in Unitarian discussions of merger. The question of Universalist survival might thus be rephrased as a question of the centrality of love in post-consolidation Unitarian Universalism.

Love is not an easy thing to measure, but I will attempt to do so by analyzing the language of texts, pre- and post-consolidation, included in the new anthology of Unitarian Universalist primarily

sources. I will reflect on the relationship between love-centered theology and other post-consolidation trends, notably the rapid increase in women in ministry, the embrace of GLBTQ liberation, and the complex evolution of anti-racist commitments. I will conclude by asking: would Unitarian Universalism ever sponsor a social justice campaign entitled “Standing on the Side of Reason” ?

*Rev. Dr. Dan McKanan* is the Emerson Senior Lecturer at Harvard Divinity School. He is the author of four books, most recently *Prophetic Encounters: Religion and the American Radical Tradition*, and the lead editor of the forthcoming anthology of primary sources for Unitarian Universalist history. He is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Medford.

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## THE ETHICS OF CIRCUMCISION AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION Curtis Murphy

Circumcision is a highly sensitive and controversial topic, which touches on foundational principles of consent, bodily autonomy, and sexual health.

The grade 7-9 Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality education curriculum states that “circumcision does not affect sexual functioning.” In fact, however, the foreskin plays a number of important roles in sexual pleasure and health, and its surgical removal is both painful and risky, and carries lifelong consequences. Circumcision is directly and indirectly responsible for numerous deaths each year.<sup>1</sup> Even greater numbers of boys suffer severe disfigurement and require follow up surgery. Even in the best case scenario, circumcision removes healthy, functional tissue and diminishes sensation. Although the medical system in North America has paid little attention to these issues, there is extensive data available in the Global Survey of Circumcision Harm,<sup>2</sup> where thousands of men have submitted evidence and testimonials documenting the harm they have suffered.

Discussion of circumcision involves problematic issues of gender, religion, and culture. This workshop demonstrates that it is possible to critically address the forced circumcision of children with sensitivity to these issues.

In her award-winning essay, registered nurse Kira Antinuk argues, “if feminism asserts that bodily integrity, autonomy, and fundamental human rights are essential components of gender equality, it follows that these must be afforded to all genders without discrimination.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, discussion of the way that circumcision primarily harms men need not detract from attention to the ways sexual violence and gender inequality affect women. !

Circumcision is also a controversial topic because of its prominent place in Jewish religion and culture, as well as the long history of anti-semitism in Western society. An important dimension to this issue is that there is a strong but often overlooked history of Jewish critique of circumcision. For example, the Brit Shalom (covenant of peace) is an increasingly popular ritual, in which boys are faithfully welcomed into the Jewish community without genital cutting.<sup>4</sup> Ignoring this trend contributes to silencing Jewish people who are advocating for body autonomy rights within their own tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Bollinger, *Lost Boys: An estimate of U.S. circumcision-related infant deaths*, THYMOS: Journal of Boyhood Studies, Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring 2010, 78-09., also Greg Nicolson, “South Africa initiation schools:

botched circumcisions, kidnap and death threats,” The Guardian, Friday 25 September, 2015.  
2www.circumcisionharm.org

3 Kira Antinuk, “Forced genital cutting in North America: Feminist theory and nursing considerations,”  
Nursing Ethics, 20(6) 723-728, 2013.

4 See the 2014 book Celebrating Brit Shalom, by Rebecca Wald and Lisa Braver Moss

*Curtis Murphy* is a candidate for UU ministry, currently enrolled in the M. Div. program at the Montreal School of Theology. He is a trained facilitator of the Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality education program.

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## FIRE ACROSS THE PRAIRIE: THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMANISM IN UNITARIANISM

Sarah Oelberg

The religious wildfire of Unitarianism between 1875-1910 was driven across Iowa by a powerful vision which inspired both clergy and laity. It evolved from the liberalism of Jenkin Lloyd Jones, was planted and expanded by mostly women ministers, and embraced by nearly all the Unitarian congregations and many individuals. It was a vision of hope and love, of social responsibility and the divinity of humanity. It was, in effect, the beginning of religious humanism. It held that "religion is a life, not a creed..." and its practitioners were opposed to the authoritarian church and ministers who only preached a narrow gospel that limited the actions of believers.

The impact of this movement was profound. It brought culture, literature, modernism and a world perspective to rural Iowa through its missionary efforts. Its ministers influenced political, academic and educational leaders and helped form Iowa into a liberal pacifist state.

The story of Unitarianism in Iowa during this period is unique and special because it was the result of the efforts of many people, clergy and laity alike, working in co-partnership for something for which they felt common ownership and love. It is very much a communal story.

The vision these pioneers of liberalism held, and the ways in which they redefined “church” may provide insights into how to revitalize UUism even today. While it may be that 19<sup>th</sup> century personalities, ideals, and locations cannot be replicated, I believe some of the important elements are again present – women in the ministry, creative tension caused by pushing the theological limits; a dedication to growth; a perceived need for better education for young people, and a society which calls out for involvement and saving.

*Rev. Dr. Sarah Oelberg:* I am a retired minister. I served churches in Hanska and Mankato, MN. I am a sixth generation Unitarian in America, and my great-grandparents and other family members were active in churches in northwestern Iowa at the time of Mary Safford, Elinor Gordon, etc. I did my Meadville dissertation on the history of Unitarianism in Iowa, and have continued to study it. This is a remarkable mostly unknown story.

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## MORDECAI DE LANGE: UNITARIAN MISSIONARY IN THE FIRST WEST, 1847-1860

*Kathleen Parker*

Unitarianism first came to the Ohio River Valley through pioneer ministers and laymen who



followed the Ohio and Mississippi River waterways to arrive at outpost communities in what would later be known as the “First West.” This was the West that existed between the Allegheny Mountains and the Mississippi River, from Buffalo to Pittsburgh to Louisville to St. Louis. White Anglo-Europeans began to settle in this territory shortly after the Missouri River travel reports of Merriweather Lewis started circulating, which encouraged eastern Americans to move into Ohio. From the 1820s through the 1840s, many towns were established all the way to the Mississippi River.

Living in these towns was a lonely business for anyone, but especially so for folks who identified as Unitarian. This fact becomes abundantly clear in the letters of Mordecai De Lange, an 1847 graduate of the Meadville Theological School, written to succeeding Secretaries of the American Unitarian Association to describe his prospects as a Minister-at-Large in this part of the country. De Lange had reportedly left Judaism, the religion of his birth, having come to see it as “a dry and withered thing.” Living in St. Louis, he met Rev. William Greenleaf Eliot, who somehow convinced him to take up the Unitarian religion. It was Eliot who convinced De Lange to enroll at the Meadville School, and from this association grew De Lange’s commitment to spreading the Truth of Unitarianism in the West.

This paper explores the stories reported in De Lange’s letters, as he sought out and preached to Unitarian “friends of the cause” in Quincy Falls, IL, Wheeling, VA, Steubenville, OH, Davenport, IA, and the nearby communities of Sterling, Dixon, and Rock Island, IL. The key methods by which to recruit followers was to preach in rented spaces to any who would listen, distribute Unitarian tracts and sets of Channing’s writings (especially his 1819 sermon on Unitarian Christianity), circulate a subscription list to pay a minister, and to recruit students from Meadville who might be encouraged to minister to Unitarian families in these remote localities. Woven into this story is the anxiety by which De Lange’s loyalty to the Society for Propagating the Gospel to Indians and Others, his first employer, was given over in service to the employ of the American Unitarian Association. This shift took place against the backdrop of yet another complication – De Lange’s conflicted relationship with AUA Secretary Holland, which yielded to a more affectionate and seemingly productive relationship with Secretaries Briggs and Lincoln. The noticeable change in tone signals perhaps a change in attitude in the AUA leadership toward De Lange, certainly, and more broadly, to Unitarian outreach in the West.

De Lange went to Pittsburgh in 1850, where he would stay for ten years. Here he would revive the church lost in 1844 with the death of its chief benefactor, Benjamin Bakewell. By this point, he was firmly committed to his work with the American Unitarian Association and soon after, in 1852, the establishment of the Western Unitarian Conference. The story of this remarkable Unitarian Minister-at-Large in the West is not well known, a situation this paper will attempt to remedy.

*Dr. Kathleen Parker* is a PhD historian, teaching at university level for twenty years. Author of many articles and two books: *Sacred Service in Civic Space*, and *Here We Have Gathered*. She is also editor of the *Journal of UU History* since 2009. A member of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh since 1999.

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## REIMAGINING CONGREGATIONAL POLITY FOR A BEYOND-CONGREGATION AGE Workshop by Sue Phillips

UUism is positioned for relevance not only because of our theology but because of our polity. This presentation will explore why our dependence on democracy endangers relevance, how autonomy has come to supplant interdependence as our polity’s primary expression, and how covenant networks could resolve fundamental tensions in our polity.

*Rev. Sue Phillips* has been a lay leader, parish minister, and now serves as our UUA's Regional Lead for New England. Prior to entering the professional ministry, Sue served on the management team of a national community development loan fund that finances affordable housing in the poorest rural communities in the United States. She is the editor, with feminist theologian Carter Heyward, of *No Easy Peace: Liberating Anglicanism*. Two of Sue's short essays appear in *Bless the Imperfect* (Kay Montgomery, ed.). She has taught Unitarian Universalist Polity at the Harvard Divinity School and is an avid student of congregational polity.

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INVITATIONS AND CHALLENGES FOR LIBERAL AND LIBERATIONIST ECOTHEOLOGIES IN  
PAUL OUTKA'S CRITIQUE OF TRANSCENDENTALISM IN HIS BOOK RACE AND NATURE:  
FROM TRANSCENDENTALISM  
TO THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Sheri Prud'homme and Sophia Betancourt

The mid to late nineteenth century was a time when the United States pushed its frontier further into expanses of "wilderness." It was also an era when European American liberal theologians and religious thinkers turned toward nature as a religious text. Moreover, it was a time of rising abolitionism and the recognition of public voices of African Americans, both as abolitionist leaders and through the freedom narratives of enslaved people. Paul Outka demonstrates that the concurrent rise of transcendentalism and a more outspoken abolitionism still furthered racialization in America and the power of white supremacy by failing to engage environmental efforts and human dignity as an interrelated whole. In the contemporary work of ecotheology and ethics, liberal religious traditions must pay attention to the ways the border between human and nonhuman nature is and has been understood and, as Outka writes, "what sort of racial identities and truths are instantiated, empowered, and naturalized in the wake of these intensely ambiguous confrontations between human and natural."<sup>1</sup>

We are proposing this scholarly paper in two voices. Sofia will explore how we as Unitarian Universalists are the inheritors of what Paul Outka names the "Americanist environmental canon" in his groundbreaking text. We are not simply shaped by Western ideas of how our humanity relates to philosophical ideals of "nature," we are also formed by the perspectives of foundational environmental thinkers from within our own religious tradition. As the spiritual descendants of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau; not only are we profoundly shaped by their idealized vision of one (white) man communing with the wilderness, we are also responsible for reimagining the transcendence they offered us. Her exploration will encourage a theoethical reflection on our current voice in racial justice and environmental justice movements. As participants in a mainstream environmental movement is predominantly white, economically privileged, and frequently focused on justice for Earth to the exclusion of all else we must seek out the ways in which our theoethical messaging is born of these inherited understandings. Only then can we construct grassroots driven, intersectional theologies that hold us accountable to justice for all peoples and all beings.

Sheri will use Thomas Starr King's nature sermons as her primary conversation partner with Outka's text. She will focus on Outka's critique of the Transcendentalist sublime. He illuminates the

way the Transcendentalist sublime participated in white-world-making and encouraged an association of whiteness with extra-historical and extra-political “wilderness.” It was a move that King stepped into right along with Emerson. However, Outka’s critique also offers new possibilities in a reconsidered natural sublime. He argues it has the capacity to unmake our preconceived constructions and allow for porous boundaries between nature as textual construction and nature as something that exists outside of the human capacity for representation with claims and rights of its own. The post-modern academic climate tends to obliterate nature in textual construction and deconstruction, erasing the language for ecological witness and making suspect the kind of ecstatic love of nature King posits in his nature sermons. Sheri will suggest that Outka’s reconsideration of the natural sublime when combined with current Unitarian Universalist theological anthropology has the potential to welcome nature back to the table in eco-theo-ethical conversations in a way that is grounded both in our theological heritage and our contemporary justice commitments.

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1 Paul Outka, *Race and Nature From Transcendentalism to the Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 14.

*Rev. Sofia Betancourt* is a Ph.D. candidate at Yale University in the departments of Religious Ethics and African American Studies. Her work focuses on environmental ethics of liberation in a womanist and Latina feminist frame. She is the Assistant Professor of Unitarian Universalist Theologies and Ethics at Starr King School for the Ministry.

*Rev. Dr. Sheri Prud’homme* received her Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union in Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Theology. She has served on the adjunct faculty of Starr King School for the Ministry for over a decade. Currently she is serving as the Minister for Faith Development at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland and is writing a book-length history of that congregation.

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## PANEL ON THE USE OF THE TERM “LIBERAL” IN UU ACADAEMIC DISCOURSE

Sheri Prud’homme, Moderator

Panelists: Sofia Betancourt, Nicole Kirk, Dan McKanan, Rosemary Bray McNatt, Tisa Wenger

This panel seeks to push our thinking as religious liberals about the very term *liberal* as it is employed, or not, by Unitarian Universalists in academic discourse in religious studies, theology, and ethics. It is intended to be of use particularly to new and emerging Unitarian Universalist scholars navigating the complex relationship of religion and academia.

In academic religious discourse, *liberal* is a contested term. Many scholars with roots in Unitarian Universalism do not claim the term *liberal* in their scholarly work. The liberal theologies group of the American Academy of Religious is a relatively small group that has at times in recent years struggled to receive enough papers to assemble a vital session. The *Journal of Liberal Religion* has not been published since 2009. Meadville Lombard Theological School has dropped the word liberal from its websites and mission. Starr King School for the Ministry uses the term once or twice on its website, primarily in appealing to donors. Gary Dorrien writes in a 2013 Religion Dispatches article that *liberal Protestant* is not a term used at Union Theological Seminary nor most other theological schools once known as bastions of liberal Protestant theology. To do so, he writes, “would smack of provincialism and the cultural presumptions of the mainline from a bygone time. And it would exclude our faculty and students that lack any connection to liberal Protestantism.” Yet, Unitarian Universalism

continues to be a religious movement that utilizes the term *liberal* in a positive light, in spite of the complex views of individual Unitarian Universalist scholars. The professional organization for Unitarian Universalist religious educators bears the name Liberal Religious Educators' Association. Collegium calls itself "an association for liberal religious studies." Paul Rasor's latest book (Skinner House, 2012) *Reclaiming Prophetic Witness* is subtitled "Liberal Religion in the Public Square." Unitarian Universalism is not entirely alone in claiming liberal religion. In July, 2013, the *New York Times* noted a surge of new writing on liberal Protestantism. Rabbi Eric H. Joffe, President Emeritus of the Union for Reform Judaism wrote a 2015 article in the *Huffington Post* claiming "This is liberal religion's moment." A number of scholars are writing on liberal Islam including Mustafa Akyol's 2011 book *Islam Without Extremes*, which is an argument for "Muslim liberalism."

This panel will address the term *liberal* as it is understood today in scholarship of religion, theology, history, and ethics. Given neo-orthodox and liberationist critiques of liberal theology and liberal religion, what do we currently mean when/if we use the term? What are the pros and cons of using the term at all? What work is waiting for us to do as liberal religious academics to complexity, reclaim, or reject the term?

*Sofia Betancourt*, Assistant Professor of Unitarian Universalist Theologies and Ethics, Starr King School for the Ministry

*Nicole Kirk*, Rev. Dr. J. Frank and Alice Schulman professor in Unitarian Universalist History, Meadville Lombard Theological School.

*Dan McKanan*, Ralph Waldo Emerson Unitarian Universalist Association Senior Lecturer in Divinity, Harvard Divinity School

*Rosemary Bray McNatt*, President, Starr King School for the Ministry

*Tisa Wenger*, Associate Professor of American Religious History, Divinity School & American Studies, Yale University

*Sheri Prud'homme*, Independent Scholar and Minister for Faith Development, First Unitarian Church of Oakland and moderator of the panel

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## OLYMPIA'S DAUGHTERS: THE LIBERAL ECUMENICAL LINEAGE OF AMERICAN CLERGYWOMEN 1850-1985

Maria Rutland

In her groundbreaking book [Prophetic Sisterhood](#) (1990; 2000), Cynthia Grant Tucker traced the lives and influence of the Unitarian "Iowa Sisterhood". This presentation will build upon the foundations of Tucker's work, tracing the influence and impact of three generations of UU clergywomen on women's ordination and acceptance in local parishes both within their denominations and into the Protestant mainline churches. Their impact transcended their lives, and their ecumenical influence can be documented into the 1980's-over 40 years after the death of Nellie Mann Opdale.

Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell (Congregationalist turned Unitarian), Rev. Olympia Brown (Universalist), and Rev. Nellie Mann Opdale mentored, molded, and modeled the best of the Liberal tradition for three generations of women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Antoinette

Brown Blackwell fought educational and cultural discrimination to first earn her undergraduate and seminary degrees at Oberlin (which were officially denied to her for many years). Newspaper articles about her struggles and her ordination to a Congregational church in rural New York inspired a young schoolgirl in Michigan named Olympia Brown. When Brown followed Antoinette Brown Blackwell's trail into higher education at Antioch College, she organized the women students to force the faculty to invite Rev. Blackwell to speak to the college. Olympia Brown was so deeply affected by the lecture and the interaction with Rev. Blackwell that she decided to study for the Universalist ministry. She was ordained in 1863 by the Universalists, one of the first women whose ordination was recognized by an American denomination.

After serving several churches in the Northeast, Olympia Brown and her family moved to Racine WI in 1878 as she assumed the pastoral leadership of the Church of the Good Shepherd. One of her young parishioners was a new public schoolteacher named Nellie Mann. Brown befriended and mentored Nellie and officiated at her marriage to Julius Opdale. In the early 1890's, both Julius and their infant son died within six months of each other. Olympia offered support to Nellie and encouraged her to serve as WI state lecturer for suffrage within a year of the deaths. By 1894, Olympia had encouraged Nellie to study for the Universalist ministry. She ultimately paved the way for Nellie to serve churches in Mukwanago and La Crosse WI.

Revs. Blackwell, Brown, and Opdale were active leaders and lecturers in the suffrage and temperance movements, and were involved in many of the social reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. All wrote and lectured extensively in support of the values of Liberal religion and courageously withstood the discrimination and bigotry leveled at them because of their unwillingness to 'stay in their place'. All used pastoral skills honed in the pulpit to further social causes in the greater society. Their social activism was a natural extension of their theology.

Nellie Mann Opdale was active in Women's Ministerial Conference (1874-1914) an annual ecumenical gathering of women who supported and encouraged clergywomen in the United States. Founded and supported by Julia Ward Howe, Unitarian activist and occasional preacher, this small annual gathering served as an incubator for an eclectic group of social reformers, missionaries, and parish ministers who were attempting to open churches, communities, and denominations to acceptance of clergywomen.

Although Nellie Mann Opdale mentored women throughout her ministerial career, darker social and theological forces were at work to suppress women from seeking ordination or filling pulpits. "The Great Suppression" quashed the desires of women who wished to fulfill their call to ministry not only within the Liberal tradition, but throughout the Protestant mainline. The groundbreaking work of hundreds of women was so suppressed, that their names have been all but forgotten. However, these brave clergywomen are still remembered and revered by local congregations and communities throughout the United States. Nellie Mann Opdale's contributions to the rural community in Georgia she served in her final decade so affected the residents that a small Presbyterian church was willing to accept a minority woman as their pastor in 1985, 44 years after Opdale's death. I was the pastor touched and blessed by work of these invisible mothers of the faith.

In the presentation, I will document this maternal pastoral lineage.

*Rev. Dr. Maria LK Rutland* received her education at Emory University (BA cum laude in American social/intellectual history), Columbia Seminary (MDiv, Columbia Fellow) and McCormick Seminary (DMin). Her DMin thesis utilized congregational history to create church revitalization. She received

a 2015 Bridwell Fellowship at Southern Methodist University to pursue research utilizing antique scrapbooks to document the history of American clergywomen, their ecumenical influences, their push for social reform, and the intertwining support networks they developed. Dr. Rutland was ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1981, and has served parishes in Georgia, Michigan, and Indiana.

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## PHEBE ANN COFFIN HANAFORD: HER FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES

Rosemarie C. Smurzynski

Phebe Ann Coffin Hanaford was born on Nantucket Island in 1829, an island of open spaces and deeply inquiring minds. Her cousins, also remarkable women and nurtured by that same island, were Maria Mitchell, the astronomer and Lucretia Mott, the abolitionist. On Nantucket in her formative years, Phebe Ann Coffin Hanaford learned independence of mind, body and spirit.

In mid-life, she became a minister. She was the first woman ordained in New England by the Universalists. She was a friend of Olympia Brown, the first woman to be ordained by the Universalists. She worked in reform movements and was a colleague and friend of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. She worked tirelessly in the women's right to vote movement. She died in 1921 living long enough to see women get the right to vote.

In 1870 after she was ordained and was serving as a minister in a congregation she separated from her husband and lived thereafter with the love of her life, Miss Ellen Miles. They lived together for 42 years, separated only by Ellen's death in 1914.

Phebe Ann Coffin Hanaford's life expresses the themes of this convocation: she broke boundaries in 19th century America. She was a woman who picked ministry as her life's work and she was a woman who openly loved another woman.

We live by connections and in relationship. This paper will focus on Phebe Ann Coffin Hanaford's life through the lens of her connections and foundational relationships with family, friends and colleagues.

*Rev. Rosemarie Smurzynski* graduated from Harvard Divinity School in 1980 and is an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister. After serving congregations in New England, both in settled and interim positions, she retired in 2011. Currently, Rev. Smurzynski is a docent at Mount Auburn Cemetery where she leads walks, often for Unitarian Universalists, church and UU history groups, and divinity school students. She has written for the Harvard Square Library, a digital journal of Unitarian Universalist history, and published in the *Journal of UU History*. With Stephanie May and Mark Harris she is on a committee to raise funds to preserve the Channing Monument at Mount Auburn Cemetery. She continues to be the Minister of the Week at the Star Island New England History Conference and is the former chair of the Star Island Historic Artifacts and Vaughn Cottage Committee.

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## HORATIO STEBBINS: GROWING UNITARIANISM BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES OF BOSTON

Arliss Ungar

Thomas Starr King was a much loved Unitarian minister both in and beyond his San Francisco Unitarian Church. When he died in 1864, the state legislature adjourned in his honor, flags were

flown and half staff, and there was a 21 gun salute. After a six months interim by Henry Bellows, Horatio Stebbins came from New York to take King's place on the California frontier. He stayed thirty-five years.

If to Starr King goes the credit for firmly establishing Unitarianism on the Pacific Coast, to Stebbins (and Eliot in Portland) go the credit for maintaining it. In 1864 when Stebbins came West, the San Francisco Unitarian Church was the only Unitarian church on the West Coast. Stebbins helped to encourage the founding and growth of additional Unitarian churches in the far west. He often spoke to assembled Unitarians thinking about establishing a church, and at church dedications.

When Stebbins came to San Francisco there was little formal education available. He played an important part in the founding of the University of California, where he served as a trustee for many years, despite the allegations in the early years of too much Unitarian influence. Stebbins was a friend of Leland Stanford who sometimes came to his church service. He was an original lifetime trustee of Stanford University, and a trustee of the Lick Mechanical Arts High School in San Francisco and the College of California in Oakland.

Stebbins was appointed to the committee that first proposed what became Starr King School. But he soon resigned because he opposed the timing of the opening of the school. He was right! No qualified person could be found willing to lead the school, and in the severe depression that soon followed, people could not provide the fund they had promised, and the opening was postponed.

Stebbins was much loved, but he was outspoken about the ideas and causes in which he believed, even when his dear friend and influential parishioner Horace Davis disagreed. Almost all the voters of San Francisco favored legislation excluding Chinese immigrants. Stebbins did not. At a Japanese embassy banquet, he called the position "absurd and ridiculous; as a policy it is nonsense; as a principle it is nowhere—it is rag-tag and bobtail. If any of your cheap politicians have won a penny by it in the passions of an hour, beware; beware when you put that penny in your purse, lest the eagle on the reverse side of the coin sticks his talons through and scratches the face of Liberty."

Stebbins served the San Francisco church for thirty-five years. After his health began to fail, he moved back to his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he died in 1902.

*Arliss Ungar*, lay historian of early San Francisco Unitarians, is a former chair of the Board of Trustees of Starr King School for the Ministry where she chairs the Balázs Scholars Program which brings Transylvanian or other international Unitarian ministers to study at the school and preach at Unitarian Universalist churches. She has written a book on the history of the school, *With Vision and Courage: Starr King School for the Ministry, The History of its First 100 Years, 1904 – 2004*. Arliss has a degree in Political Science from Stanford University and an honorary doctorate from Starr King School for the Ministry.

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## THE HUMANIST CAMELOT IN WESTERN WISCONSIN 1888-1892

Performance written by Victor Urbanowicz

A dramatic reading, with projected images, about the Mabel Tainter Memorial, built in 1889 for a humanistic Unitarian congregation by a lumber baron and his wife and first served by an agnostic minister. The building served multiple community purposes then and, splendidly restored, continues to do so today.

Script by *Victor Urbanowicz*, Ph.D. (English), under the guidance of Timothy Hirsch, professor

emeritus of English, University of Wisconsin, and an authority on Andrew Tainter and the Memorial. The History and Heritage Committee of the MidAmerica Region/UUA is in charge of casting, production, and direction.

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## EMBODIED JUSTICE IN HIGGINSON'S MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY AND TODAY

Liz Weber

Because Unitarian Universalism has struggled at times to fully embody its commitments to justice, this paper will look to the historical model of Thomas Wentworth Higginson as someone who wrestled with the hegemonic values of his time and incorporated their better parts with his own radical commitments to equality. It will focus on Higginson's particular understanding of muscular Christianity as quintessential to his integration of faith and politics *vis-à-vis* the physical body. It will finally investigate the theosocial implications of his example in order to arrive at lessons for our contemporary movement.

Muscular Christianity was a nineteenth-century social and religious movement whose advocates sought to advance Christian morality by intertwining masculinity and virtue. Its proponents held that moral character was directly improved by increasing physical ability. Physical strength became tantamount to Christian virtue. The physically/morally improved masculine body also served as a symbol for national moral superiority.

Muscular Christianity was first advanced in America by Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911). Higginson was a Unitarian minister and radical public figure who supported abolition and women's suffrage. He spoke and wrote prolifically in venues such as *The Liberator* and *The Atlantic Monthly*. He was a participant in the Underground Railroad and the Colonel of the first Black regiment of Union soldiers during the Civil War. He signed the first call for a national gathering for women's suffrage. Higginson also critiqued Victorian America for its lack of attention to the body, which led him to muscular Christianity.

The intersection of Higginson's theology and politics is quite rich. Because muscular Christianity idealized the white, male body, it typically excluded women and people of color and perpetuated their oppression. It promoted masculinity and prescribed separate spheres for women and men; it fully participated in Victorian society's objectification of non-Anglo-Saxons, maintaining white supremacy while simultaneously idealizing the physicality of the "inferior" races. Higginson, in contrast, adhered to muscular Christianity's core value of physical/moral improvement without succumbing to its oppressive implications or abandoning his politics. This paper will examine how his muscular Christian theology and radical politics influenced one another.

Higginson's views on race and gender not only lend complexity to his muscular Christianity, they also grant insight into the theosocially constructed nature of the body. Examining Higginson's perspective allows us to more fully see our own perspective, possibly even to more fully recognize our own limitations. Finally, this paper will reflect on how Higginson's attention to the body can serve to enlarge our own work for justice by helping us to see ourselves.

*Liz Weber* is a seminarian at Andover Newton Theological School and serves as the intern minister at the UU Church of Reading, MA. Liz has strong interests in theologies of the body; dismantling white supremacy, ableism, and all strands of kyriarchy; and the power of language. She is also a nationally certified American Sign Language interpreter in private practice.

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## WAS THE AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION RESPONSIVE TO FELLOWSHIPS' NEEDS?

M. Pippin Whitaker

**BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE:** The fellowship movement (1948-1967) was a dramatic growth strategy with ongoing implications for Unitarian Universalism today. Chief among these implications are unlearned lessons about how the denomination and its' governing body, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), responds to growth. The lessons of the fellowship movement can open our awareness to and suggest new ways of responding to growth challenges, especially regarding how the denomination grapples with strain on power and authority structures.

This paper asks whether the American Unitarian Association (AUA) acted responsively toward two new fellowships gathered in the mid-fifties—during the middle of the fellowship movement. For this paper, responsivity involves reacting supportively toward the unfolding formation needs of fellowships. This paper examines in depth the AUA's responsivity to two new fellowships established during the middle of the fellowship movement. This examination is then situated within the wider context of the fellowship movement.

**METHODS:** This paper uses a grounded theory approach to explore archived communication between the AUA and two fellowships during the period 1953 through 1967. The fellowships were established within 20 miles of each other in 1953 and 1954 in the Southeastern US. The neighboring fellowships were selected due to their geographical and temporal proximity and to explore inter-fellowship relationships. The archival review revealed themes pertaining to responsivity that were then applied to a review of additional sources. Additional sources include AUA governing documents, AUA Extension Office materials, publications by AUA staff, the Christian Register, proceedings of the Unitarian Historical Society, and scholarly books.

**RESULTS:** The AUA Extension Office struggled to act responsively to the two fellowships' needs in religious education, communion with other congregations, and formation around purpose. These challenges were consistent within the wider fellowship movement. Several aspects of fellowship program structure contributed to these challenges. First, program structure was relatively fixed and inherently unresponsive. The needs of children and youth were subordinated to adults' needs as a matter of policy. AUA leadership provided ambiguous, under articulated, and primarily unidirectional support for formation around fellowship purpose. Structure and support for relationship building among congregations was lacking.

**IMPLICATIONS:** The Fellowship Office operated within organizational limitations and made assumptions about the needs of diverse communities that were at times in conflict with new fellowships' experiences. The history of the fellowship movement holds valuable lessons about how Unitarianism and its' Association responded to growth. These lessons can open awareness to ways of responding to growth, especially regarding how the Unitarian Universalist denomination grapples with strain on power and authority structures amid current growth challenges. The UUA is on the edge of growth in new directions. As the denomination conceives of the intent and purpose of such growth, it is vital that it also learns from historical growth patterns such as the fellowship movement. This paper makes specific observations regarding responsivity based on challenges and opportunities documented during this formative experience in UU history.

*Pippin Whitaker* is a Candidate for Unitarian Universalist Ministry and a Master of Divinity candidate at Meadville Lombard Theological School. Pippin is also a scholar and evaluation consultant, and her work focuses on resilient community change for violence prevention and promoting healthy

relationships.

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## WHEN JAPANESE UNITARIANS TOLD THE AUA TO GO

George M. Williams

Shin'ichiro Imaoka was the last secretary of the mission. Three major missionary-field workers (Knapp, MacCauley, Lawrence) with differing personalities and approaches to the Unitarian missionary enterprise had amazing success. And then the last AUA missionary, Rev. John Day, was asked to close the mission and go.

*Dr. George M. Williams* has a Ph.D. in the history of religions as well as honorary doctorates from Starr King and the United Protestant Theological School in Kolozsvár. Williams has worked for nearly three decades on understanding liberal Buddhist and Shinto groups in Japan, most of whom are partners with the UUA in IARF. He knew Rev. Dr. Shin'ichiro Imaoka the last seven years of his life, interviewing him and collecting materials about his influence on progressive and liberating religion in Japan. Since retirement in 2003 Williams has published monographs on Hindu Mythology and Shinto.