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THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
HISTORY AND HERITAGE
SOCIETY BULLETIN



Conrad Wright Lecture at General Assembly 2018

“The Contested History of Religious Freedom”

Dr. Tisa Wenger, Yale Divinity School

The Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society invites you to join us at General Assembly in Kansas City for the Conrad Wright Lecture entitled, “The Contested History of Religious Freedom.” Last year, over one hundred people attended the lecture at GA. We are delighted to offer a lecture this year by another outstanding scholar on a topic that is highly relevant for today’s world.

This year’s lecturer is Dr. Tisa Wenger, Associate Professor American Religious History at Yale Divinity School, author of *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* in 2009 and her latest book, *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* by University of North Carolina Press in 2017. In this lecture, Dr. Wenger explores how religious freedom has so often been presented as a timeless American ideal—one that Unitarian Universalists have always claimed as their own—yet Americans have never agreed about what it means or how it should be applied. She argues that American controversies over religious freedom cannot be separated from the histories of race and empire. The most vocal appeals to religious freedom have often privileged the dominant white Christian population. At the same time, minority and colonized peoples have reinterpreted this freedom in their own defense. Today this freedom serves as a rallying cry for the Christian right, making its contentious history more consequential than it has ever been. The first annual Conrad Wright lecture was given in 2008 by J.D. Bowers on Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America. Past lecturers have included Charles Capper, Kristin Gwinn-Becker, Christopher Cameron, Megan Marshall, James Ishmael Ford, and Emily Clark.





A Message from Conrad Edick Wright, son of Conrad Wright

Dear friends,

In the years before his death in 2011, my father, Conrad Wright, sometimes wondered whether anyone would remember his accomplishments. Such concerns, after all, are not uncommon toward the end of life. Although he had spent a long career as a Harvard faculty member; had written and edited a host of books, including important and enduring treatments of the history of American Unitarianism; and had been a stalwart at certain institutions he cared about, among them the Harvard Divinity School, the Unitarian Universalist Association, and First Parish in Cambridge, it was reasonable of him to doubt that future generations would be aware of his efforts.

At a time when my father wondered whether anyone would remember all he had done, an institution he cared about recognized him in a way he appreciated deeply. Over the years, he had devoted a great deal of energy to the work of the Unitarian Universalist Historical Society, now the Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society. The UUHS's president for many years, the editor of its journal, and a longtime adviser to his successors in the society's leadership, he had been its most dedicated and influential member for decades. In recognition of his service, the UUHS created the annual Conrad Wright Lecture, first presented in 2008.

The organization's board always intended to endow the lectureship, but multiple early efforts fell far short. Now the board is determined to revive the initiative and has set a goal of \$20,000 in endowment. Income from the fund will offset the program's necessary expenses, including honorarium, travel, lodging and General Assembly fees. Recently, my wife, Mary, and I pledged \$2,000 to this cause in the form of a challenge grant to be matched by \$6,000 in additional gifts. Contributions and pledges from current members of the UUHHS board and others close to the society have made a good start toward this goal, but to succeed we need to raise several thousand dollars more. If we all contribute what we are able, both the challenge target and the overall endowment goal are well within reach. Won't you help us achieve this objective?

Sincerely,

Conrad Edick Wright

President, Unitarian Universalist Historical Society, 1993-1998

If you would like to donate, please send a check clearly marked Conrad Wright Lecture, to: UUHHS, 670 High St., Dedham, MA 02026



PRESIDENT’S POST

CONVO 2019

2019 marks the 200th anniversary of the first great landmark event in American Unitarian History. On May 5, 1819, William Ellery Channing delivered a sermon at the Ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks in the First Independent Church of Baltimore entitled Unitarian Christianity, more often referred to as the Baltimore Sermon. And since the fourth of our triennial History Convocations falls in 2019, it seemed appropriate that we return to the city so significant in the origins of our Unitarian movement.

As it happens the year 2020 also marks a landmark in Universalist history. And its locale is not far from Baltimore: the 250th anniversary of John Murray’s first arrival in America at Good Luck, New Jersey, where he preached his first sermon as a Universalist minister on September 30. Planning for the next Convo in October of 2019, is well under way. The Planning Team presently includes Carol Haag (Convenor), Mark Hicks, John Leeker, Natalie Malter, Kathy Parker, and Liz Strong. We will augment this core group with other volunteers, and are looking especially for those from the Baltimore area who would like to help out. If that sounds like you, please let me know!

CONRAD WRIGHT LECTURE

2018 marks the tenth anniversary of the Conrad Wright Lecture, and we look forward to hearing Yale professor Tisa Wenger speak at General Assembly in June on “The Contested History of Religious Freedom”, based on her recently published book. Those who attended Convo 2016 will remember Dr. Wenger was our featured (and highly praised) UUHHS Speaker. Those who missed the Convocation can look forward to reading her in our Journal of UU History, which our members will receive this spring.

(Speaking of members, have you kept your membership up to date?) Also, as you will notice, we have begun a campaign to assure the future of the Wright Lecture by funding a modest endowment of \$20,000. Please consider a generous gift, as you are able. Thank you!

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****HAVE AN INTERESTING HISTORIC UU FIND THAT YOU WANT TO SHARE WITH UUHHS?*****

Please send any submissions about your local UU history and heritage to the UUHHS newsletter! Send all submissions to newsletter editor, Phoebe Cos at phobekates16@gmail.com by May 1st. We look forward to hearing your stories!



A Brief History of Early Universalist Religious Education

By The Rev. Dr. Elizabeth M. Strong
Minister Emerita First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Ashby, MA
2018

In the mid-1700s the Sunday School movement began in England and came to America in the late-1700s. The content and method of instruction were biblical catechisms, done in the home on Sunday mornings and taught children the theology of the faith.

Theological, biblical, evolutionary, educational and scientific challenges converged throughout the American culture in the late 1800s and early 1900s to bring about radical changes in how denominations educated their children in ways of the faith.

The Higher biblical criticism brought major changes to biblical study; Progressive education and child development theories espoused significant changes in pedagogy; Darwin's theories of evolution challenged theological beliefs of creation and how life emerged and changed throughout history; and the discoveries in the field of geology challenged beliefs of when the world began. Universalists and Unitarians were deeply involved in these movements and addressed these challenges through the development of curricula that reflected each of them: The Universalist *Murray Graded Sunday School* and Unitarian *Beacon Series* were the first such publications from 1910 to 1930.

During the late 1800s Dr. Orello Cone, Professor of Biblical Literature at St. Lawrence Theological School went to Germany to study the developing Higher Biblical Criticism, specifically historical criticism. He returned to St. Lawrence in 1901 and worked with then President of the School, George Huntly, to revise biblical study and the development of the Murray Graded Lessons. Meanwhile, Rev. Dr. Marion D. Shutter, minister of the Universalist Church in Minneapolis, a strong advocate of evolution, wrote ten lectures on Evolution and Universalist Theology that were published in his book *Applied Evolution*. Huntly became the President of the Universalist General Sunday School Society and Shutter served on the curriculum committee writing the *Murray Graded Lessons*, published in 1912 by the Murray Press of the Universalist Publishing House.

Through the work of Huntly and Cone, St. Lawrence established a strong commitment to the Sunday School movement within Universalism. In the first half of the 1900s the theological students received a bachelor of divinity degree and a certificate of religious education. Professor of Religious Education, Angus H. MacLean was instrumental in establishing the strength of a ministry in religious education in our congregations throughout the remainder of the century. His philosophy of education, *The Method is the Message*, became the standard for Universalist education programs, and is still held in high regard.

Also during the 1930s through the 1940s more women began to be influential voices and participants in the development of religious education philosophy, curricula and methodology. Dorothy Spoerl, Edith Hunter, Edna Bruner, Elizabeth Manwell and Sophia Fahs served as leaders in the newly merged Unitarian and Universalist Department of Religious Education. Sophia Fahs became head of the department and guided the development of the New Beacon Series.



From your Journal Editor-Kathleen Parker

It's been a long winter, but here we are near the end of March! May is not so far away and with its arrival, you can expect to see volume 41 of our journal appearing in your mailbox! As promised, the articles featured in this excellent issue are taken from the papers presented at our 2016 Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Studies. The theme of this Convo focused on the importance of questioning the usual stories of white settler triumph in the late nineteenth century. Included in this issue is an adaptation of the lecture given by our UUHHS Theme Speaker, Tisa Wenger. Her title, "Unitarians in the Age of Empire," explores the ways in which Unitarians and other religious liberals participated in the patterns of oppression that typified U.S. imperial ambition. Additional articles in this issue feature the story of the Unitarian Industrial School for Indians on the Crow Reservation in Montana in the 1880s, authored by Dana Capasso. The story of the early Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon in the 1890s, told by Cindy Cumfer, questions the extent to which the "civilizing" reform efforts of the church women and their minister reflected their self-serving positions of privilege.

Additional articles feature a revealing look at Theodore Parker, by Jim Kelley; a clarifying picture of the inclusive legacy of early Harvard professor Converse Francis, by Mark Harris; and a thought-provoking study of the limits of AUA assistance made available to new fellowships in the mid-1950s, by Pippin Whitaker.

As we examine ourselves and seek to better our Unitarian Universalist sense of inclusion, we will be well-served to take the writings in this issue of the journal to heart. While they complicate our understanding of who we were in the past, they can help us be more honest in committing ourselves to more generous social outreach today.