



# THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST HISTORY AND HERITAGE SOCIETY BULLETIN



## Introducing “Reckoning International U/UU Histories”

*Claudia Elferdink, Reckoning U/UU Project Convener*

“**Reckoning International U/UU Histories**” is a new project to offer zoom webinars and disrupt some of our Unitarian/Unitarian Universalist stories in the light of both centering marginalized people, and the wisdom of our co-religionists across the seas. We are looking to our real past to imagine our future together. For example,

- What might Unitarians in Transylvania offer about living in authoritarian times? Then and Now?
- Unpacking world U/UU in the context of Radical Christianity
- How has racism and colonialism shaped U/UU in the UK, USA and Transylvania- India and the Philippines?
- Women, Marriage and Gender: Unitarians in International Patriarchal Cultures
- And more!

The UUMA Ministry for Lifelong Learning, Starr King School for Ministry and the UU History and Heritage Society are engaging historians, ministers and scholars to ponder such questions. We are a diverse group from Transylvania, Great Britain and the United States and we seek more participation from marginalized and more global U/UUs. We are now in the planning stages. Some of the leaders creating spring webinars are Darrick Jackson, Sandor Kovacs, Meg Richardson, Derek McAuley, Mark Harris, Lehel Molnar, and Claudia Elferdink.

Planning the initial free online programs in April and May maximizes Covid time while sheltering in place. What better time to dig into this deep intersectional work? Sessions will be publicized through the institutions and people above, and will be easily accessible on Zoom. Look for more information on our multi-media outlets. Now is the time for reckoning our U/UU histories, identity and our world today. In the process, we will engage and strengthen our global Beloved Community.



## The Legacy of the Polish Brethren

Jay Atkinson

Despite their provocative influence on the course of religious thinking in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Polish Brethren remain sadly marginalized in the way that we typically understand the early *anti-trinitarian* movements that took root in Eastern Europe at the radical edge of the Protestant Reformation. In most of our UU sermons and religious education materials, events in Transylvania tend to be emphasized while the far more impactful activity of the Polish Brethren goes largely unmentioned.

The first openly anti-trinitarian testimony within Poland occurred at a Reformed synod in 1556, and by 1565 the Polish Brethren had gained enough adherents to split Poland's Reformed movement into Calvinist and liberalizing (if not yet quite "unitarian") branches. Four years later, the newly founded town of Raków, intentionally chartered for religious pluralism and toleration, would be settled by a theologically restless congeries of radical pacifists, nobles who had freed their serfs, and communitarian idealists, all of whom reportedly spent long days and nights in religious debate.

Once the dust had settled, the Polish Brethren got down to the more serious work of educating their youth, publishing an early catechism (1574) among other books, and resolving their theological and organizational disarray. The latter effort was crucially aided by the arrival, in 1580, of Fausto Sozzini (Socinus), who shaped the movement and ultimately gave his name to what became known outside of Poland as "Socinianism."

By 1602, Raków had become the Polish Brethren's intellectual center, with an academy that educated more than a thousand students over its lifetime and a printing press from which more than a hundred titles (small sample at right) circulated across Europe, spreading radically innovative ideas in theology, social ethics, and church-state separation. Although resurgent Catholicism forced both press and academy to be shut down by 1638, and the Polish Brethren were forced into exile or reconversion by 1660, the literature of the Raków press, more than anything else, constitutes the lasting legacy of their movement. Socinian books, despite orthodox condemnation, had major influence in Holland and England, planting the seeds for British Unitarianism late in the following century.



Lack of English translations of this seminal body of work has hampered our appreciation and critical scholarly appraisal of the radically important theological departures initiated by Fausto Sozzini in the 1580s and carried forward by a second generation of his disciples through 1635. For that reason, the Socinus Endowment Fund, recently established under UUHHS auspices (see previous issue of this newsletter), offers the welcome promise of bringing this legacy more fully to light by funding translation projects and encouraging wider scholarly attention to this neglected repository through essay contests and research grants.

Your responses and financial support of this fund would be greatly appreciated. Gifts (with memo to Socinus Endowment) may be made online or sent to UUHHS treasurer, Rali Weaver (info at [www.uuhhs.org](http://www.uuhhs.org)). Questions may be directed to Jay Atkinson ([jayatk40@gmail.com](mailto:jayatk40@gmail.com)).



## A Note from your Editor about our Upcoming Journal

*Kathleen Parker, Journal Editor*

Our spring 2021 journal is in production and will be mailed to you in May! If your mailing address has changed in the last year, please let us know by sending your new address ASAP to: [Krparker.4487@gmail.com](mailto:Krparker.4487@gmail.com) OR to: [uuhistoryandheritage@gmail.com](mailto:uuhistoryandheritage@gmail.com)

Volume 44 promises to be a most interesting issue, opening with the second lecture given by Mark Harris at the 2019 Convocation of UU Studies: “Riding the Circuit to Salvation.” This is followed with a paper by J. Sylvan on “The Risks of Radical Welcome: Arlington Street Church and Gay Rights, 1973-1983.” Paul Beedle follows with a paper on the “Origins of Unitarianism and Universalism in New Orleans,” which is followed by another look at our Universalist history with Deidre Johnson, “Instead of the Brier”: The Life and Works of Mrs. E.M. Bruce.” The final section of the upcoming journal reveals a part of our Transylvanian Unitarian past with two sermons, first delivered in 1597 in Transylvania by Bishop György Enyedi and translated into modern English by Robert Kokenyesi. Further explanation of these sermons is offered by Borbála Lovas in her very new work: “Sixteenth-century Unitarian Interpretations of Psalm 2.” Beyond this, we will learn much from the years-long study completed by Claudia Elferdink (in consultation with Lehel Molnar, archivist at the Hungarian Unitarian Church Archives in Kolozsvár) on “Anna Eddy Richmond and the Origins of Unitarian Transnational Relations: Transylvania, Great Britain, and America.” Wonderful book reviews will further fill out the pages of this very rich volume!





## UPCOMING CONTESTS

### DUUB 2020-2021 Prize Competition

The Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biographies will award a monetary prize for the best submission of a new “biography” in each of these three categories:

1. Marginalized Identity Prize (\$300) - This prize will be awarded in 2021 for the best new biography of a Black, Indigenous or other Person of Color (BIPOC), LGBTQ+, or disabled Unitarian, Universalist or Unitarian Universalist. Biographies are not limited to be about religious professionals; essays about UU lay leaders, congregants, activists, and others are welcome. Entries should be no more than 2,500 words in length and include a list of sources consulted.
2. New Biography Prize (\$200) – This prize will be awarded in 2021 for the best new biography of a non-BIPOC, LGBTQ+ or disabled Unitarian, Universalist or Unitarian Universalist. Biographies are not limited to be about religious professionals; essays about UU lay leaders, congregants, activists, and others are welcome. Entries should be no more than 2,500 words in length and include a list of sources consulted.
3. Revisited Biography Prize (\$100) – This prize will be awarded to the best revision or retelling of an existing biography published before 2010 through an anti-racism, anti-oppression frame of reference. Biographies are not limited to be about religious professionals; essays about UU lay leaders, congregants, activists, and others are welcome. Entries should be no more than 2,500 words in length and include a list of sources consulted.

Submissions from BIPOC and others of marginalized identities are strongly encouraged. The deadline for submissions is June 1, 2021. Please direct entries and questions to DUUB Editor Connie Simon at [editor@uudb.org](mailto:editor@uudb.org). In addition to the monetary award, winners will receive a free one-year membership in the Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society. All submissions will be considered for publication in the Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography.

### Polish Brethren Contest Announcement

On behalf of the Socinus Endowment Fund, the Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society ([uuhhs.org](http://uuhhs.org)) is pleased to announce a 2021 contest for scholarly papers that address some aspect of the history and influence of the Polish Brethren—their theology, ecclesiology, social ethics, or organizational history and the relevance of their ideas for modern Unitarian Universalist thought and practice.

The contest is open inclusively to students and established scholars, clergy and laypeople, academics and independent scholars. Papers should be roughly 4000-7500 words in length, including footnotes, draw on primary sources, be organized around a clear thesis, and adhere to rigorous scholarly style and standards. Papers should be submitted in Word.docx format and sent by email attachment to Dan McKanan, at [dmckanan@hds.harvard.edu](mailto:dmckanan@hds.harvard.edu). For the purpose of “blind” evaluation, the author’s name and contact information should be submitted separately from the body of the paper itself.

A prize of \$500 will be awarded to the writer of the best qualifying submission.

Deadline for submissions is November 1, 2021.

Questions may be directed to Jay Atkinson: [jayatk40@gmail.com](mailto:jayatk40@gmail.com).



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The present UU History and Heritage Society is itself the product of several previous mergers: those of the Unitarian and Universalist History Societies in the 1960s, and more recently with the UU Women's Heritage Society. Recognizing that historical studies, to be truly relevant, must embrace ethical and theological reflection and use methods from many other disciplines, your board has easily embraced the proposal from Collegium, a network of interested scholars of our movement, in many of those fields, as well as history, to join forces. We have now arrived at a name for the proposed new organization, with the following mission statement:

*The Unitarian Universalist Studies Network (UUSN) is a mutually supportive collective of academic and independent scholars, lay leaders, religious professionals, and students who aim to cultivate deeper engagement in the intersections and interplay of Unitarian Universalist historical, theological, and ethical knowledge and practices.*

In order to embrace the work of dismantling a culture of white supremacy, leaders of both groups read and discussed the report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change, Widening the Circle of Concern. We also studied the work of aimee marie brown, *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds* (AK Press, 2017).

Dr. Dan McKanan, who holds the UUA Emerson Chair in Unitarian Universalist Studies at Harvard Divinity School, and who has been a stalwart in both organizations, is leading the work of drafting bylaws for UUSN. A first draft is expected by March 15. Meanwhile, another group, led by the Revs. Patrice Curtis and Barbara Coeyman, is thinking about how to carry forward the existing programs of both organizations and envision some new possibilities. For example, this year of pandemic has awakened many of

us to the possibilities of using technologies like Zoom for conferencing, teaching, lecturing, and scholarly interchange. Our member Rev. Claudia Efferdink has launched a series of Zoom meetings she calls "Reckonings," bringing together scholars and students of liberal religious history in the U.S., the U.K, and Eastern Europe. One early emphasis is on translating more historical studies of Hungarian Unitarianism into English, but the possibilities are literally global.

The Rev. Dr. Stephanie May of First Parish in Wayland, President of Collegium, not only led the mission/vision work for UUSN, but has worked with me on administrative issues. Meadville/Lombard Theological School has long provided Collegium with support for financial record keeping. UUHHS, frankly, has struggled with such issues. Having been Treasurer, I can easily admit that. Dr. Elias Ortega of M/L has been most cooperative. Stephanie and I will do a Zoom talk with him just before the UUA General Assembly on collaboration in the furtherance of scholarship. Once governance documents for the new UU Studies Network are affirmed by the leaders of both organizations, the intention is to enter into a formal memorandum of understanding with M/L, beginning in July, 2021.

I don't know about you, but I am feeling genuinely excited by the way in which our home-bound existence during this terrible pandemic has oddly opened new possibilities. Just today, my wife and I got our first vaccinations against Covid-19. Now in our 70s, we will go back three weeks from now for a second dose. But by then I will be teaching the fifth iteration of my four-part Zoom course on the Transcendentalists as social activists:

1) Definitions and Spiritual Disciplines: Transcending Differences





2) Forgotten Women: Race and the Need for Intersectionality

3) Black and White

Transcendentalists: Understanding the Stages of Abolitionism

4) Reverence for Nature:

Transcendentalism and the Roots of Environmentalism

These are newly modified titles, but that is what dialogical teaching will teach one to do! It's my conviction that our history, and our history of ethical and theological reflection, is more relevant now than perhaps at any time since the Transcendentalists spoke and acted in the years just before the Civil War.

These are extraordinary times. They have deepened a divide between the financial secure and the insecure. Gwen and I are, blessedly, in the first category. Living modestly, we are able to do some extraordinary giving. The transition to the new UU Studies Network will entail some expenses. I invite you to join me in embracing this new vision. Here is where to renew your commitment, then go to "Additional Donation" below. Give what you can! <https://uuhhs.org/join/> Feel free to contact me personally and directly with your thoughts.

Yours in faith, hope, and love,  
John Buehrens ([jbuehrens@comcast.net](mailto:jbuehrens@comcast.net))  
Past President, UUA, 1993-2001  
Current President, UU History and Heritage Society



**Check out our updated website!**

**Stay up-to-date on announcements, check out our bookshop and an archive of newsletters!**

**[www.uuhhs.org](http://www.uuhhs.org)**





## Announcing the Conrad Wright Lecturer 2021

Nicole Kirk, UUHHS Vice President

The 2021 Conrad Wright Lecturer is the award-winning historian Dr. Judith Weisenfeld, the Agate Brown and George L. Collord Professor of Religion at Princeton University. Drawing from her current research, Dr. Weisenfeld's lecture "Race, African American Religion, and American Psychiatry" explores how early American psychiatry emerged within the racialized landscape of religion in the United States and considers how ideas about race, religion, and mental normalcy shaped African Americans' possibilities for community formation and spiritual healing in the aftermath of slavery. More details for the lecture will be forthcoming.

In an interview with Princeton University's *Discovery Magazine: Research at Princeton University*, Dr. Weisenfeld described her work "tracing the stories of African Americans declared insane over the century following Emancipation," following "the rise in psychiatry as a field of science and the parallel ascent of the discipline's racialized theories about African Americans, theories that helped fuel continued subjugation after the end of slavery." Her research shows how "racialized theories persisted among influential white psychiatrists well into the 20th century." (Read the entire interview by clicking this link).

Dr. Weisenfeld is the author of several books including *New World A-Coming: Black Religion and Racial Identity during the Great Migration* (Winner of the 2017 Albert J. Raboteau Book Prize for the Best Book in Africana Religions), *Hollywood Be Thy Name: African American Religion in American Film, 1929–1949*, and *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945*. She is an editor of the journal *Religion & American Culture* and serves on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Africana Religions* and *American Religion*. Dr. Weisenfeld is an elected member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Society of American Historians.

UUHHS continues its commitment to excellence in history and honoring the legacy of Conrad Wright by inviting leading and promising new scholars to give Lecture each year. Past lecturers include Christopher Cameron (University of North Carolina), Sylvester Johnson (Virginia Tech), Tisa Wenger (Yale University), and Kathryn Gin Lum (Stanford University), among others.



**Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society Board 2020-2021**

John Buehrens, *President*

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Gail Forsyth-Vail, *Board Member*

Tisa Wenger, *Board Member*

**BECOME A MEMBER of UUHHS TODAY**

We invite you to become a member of the UU History & Heritage Society. By joining UUHHS, you help promote and preserve Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist history. A deeper understanding of our past is key in this moment of transformation, racial justice, and a part of the work towards healing and restoration. We ask all current members – check in with your friends – your colleagues – and invite them to join. Send them the info. It takes just a minute or two and is vital to sustaining our shared work.

Here are some of the benefits of membership:

- a copy of the *Journal of Unitarian Universalist History* (<https://uuhhs.org/journal-of-uu-history/>);
- supporting and expanding the resource DICTIONARY OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST BIOGRAPHY: <http://uudb.org> ;
- the Annual Conrad Wright Lecture;
- announcements for lectures and other special events;
- support a listserv for UU history questions and community;
- supporting the larger work of the UU history and heritage society and encourages and supports the interpretation, analysis, and preservation of Universalist and Unitarian history.

It only takes a moment to become a member. Membership dues are:

- Individual one year \$50
- Individual three years \$125 (Recommended)
- Student or Low Income \$30

JOIN online through the website <http://uuhhs.org/join/>

OR send a note requesting membership and a check. Please include in your note your name, address, email, and phone to:

UUHHS  
670 High Street  
Dedham, MA 02026

The Society is one of the oldest Unitarian Universalist organizations dating back to the founding of the Universalist Historical Society in 1834 and the Unitarian Historical Society in 1901. The two organizations merged in 1978 and the Women’s Heritage Society, founded in 1980, became a part of the society in 2001.