

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Session Plan

Women of the West

From Unitarian Universalist Women's Heritage Society (UUWHS) Worship Service created by Dorothy Emerson and Christine Jaronski for Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, June 28, 1999, Salt Lake City, Utah

Chalice Lighting/Opening Words

What I endured on the plains only those that crossed in '59 know. There was no station until we got to within 80 miles of Denver—no road a good part of the way. I was weak and feeble, having nearly shaken myself to death with fever and ague in Kansas. . . . I had to cook for all our party and I did not find it a pleasure. Sometimes the wind would blow furiously and it is not very pleasant to cook over a camp fire in a wind storm when that fire is made of buffalo chips and every gust of wind would carry them over the barren prairie. By the time I would get them gathered together, another puff (and so on, lasting three or four days).

Every Sunday we rested, if rested it could be called. The men would go hunting, while I would cook, wash and iron, which kept me employed all day. My baby was teething and was sick all the way across, which with my other work, made it hard for me.

By Augusta Louise Pierce Tabor (1833-1895), From *Augusta Tabor: A Pioneering Woman*, by Betty Moynihan, Cordillera Press, 1988

Check in: How are things for you today?

Topic/Activity

A notable factor of many of the historic Unitarian and Universalist women in the west is that of having left where they grew up and moving to the west. This involved developing new connections and communities. While moving today is certainly physically different than generations ago, leaving the known for a new area still takes courage, patience and a sense of adventure.

What has moving from one location to another meant for you? Have you been able to find Unitarian Universalist connections in your new location?

If you have not moved from the area where you grew up, how have you been able to make an impact over years where you are?

How are people “from away” welcomed in your Unitarian Universalist community? What impact do people who move into your community have on your spiritual community?

What connections that women can make in your congregation?

Closing Words:

I am not sure that anything whatever could relieve or comfort me under my present very depressing condition of health, but if anything could it would be a congenial female companion with whom I could chat and be merry— sympathize and advise. The being alone all day from eight in the morning to seven at night ensures a too great seriousness. There is nothing to call out any other faculties of mind, fancy, imagination, affection, mirthfulness, nothing in fact to kindle or excite a worthy spirit life. . . . Every good woman needs a companion of her own sex, no matter how numerous or valuable her male acquaintances, no matter how close the union between herself and her husband; if she have a genial, loving nature, the want of a female friend is felt as a sad void.

By Georgiana Bruce Kirby (1818-1887)

From *Georgiana: Feminist Reformer of the West*, Santa Cruz County Historical Trust, 1987

Background: Women of the West

Rev. Mary C. Billings. A life-long Universalist born in Connecticut, Mary's third husband was the first Texas State Missionary sent there to bring the good news of Universalism to Texas. Mary was well-known to Universalists through her contributions to *Ladies' Repository*, *Rose of Sharon*, *Lily of the Valley*, and other denominational publications. She was licensed to preach in 1886 and ordained in 1892.

Ada Choate Burpee Bowles (1836-1928). Universalist minister who was born in Massachusetts, but came to California with her minister-husband to spread the good news of Universalism on the west coast. While in San Francisco, she edited a regular newspaper column on women's suffrage and was president of the San Francisco Woman's Suffrage Society.

Mary Phelps Austin Halley (1784-1846) Born in Connecticut. After her minister-husband died at sea, she and her young son moved to Texas to be near her relatives. In the early 1830s, she wrote a book, *Texas: Observations Historical, Geographical and Descriptive*, that was thought to have greatly encouraged settlers to move to Texas and is still considered one of the most reliable sources of information on Texas in that era.

Georgiana Bruce Kirby (1818-1887) Born in difficult circumstances in England, she eventually found work in Boston, Massachusetts, educated herself. For three years she participated in the socialist utopian community of Brook Farm where she met Eliza Farnham, with whom Georgiana worked on prison reform. Later the two traveled west to share a 200-acre farm Eliza had inherited until both women married. Georgiana lived in Santa Cruz, California and continued her ongoing commitment to social reform, and her faith in the strength and support of women.

Augusta Louise Pierce Tabor (1833-1895) Born in Maine, she went to Kansas Territory shortly after her marriage. Augusta founded the Pioneer Ladies Aid Society, an organization that offered friendship and financial assistance to women who had accompanied their men into mining camps and were later left alone by death, desertion, or divorce. Augusta was active in the Unitarian Church in Denver.

Helen Marie Fiske Hunt Jackson (1830-1855) Born in Massachusetts, she was pushed her into writing as a career by the death of her husband and infant son and the support of several Unitarian ministers. Because of chronic illness, she moved to Colorado in her late 30s. There she became outraged at the plight of indigenous people and published a document called *A Century of Dishonor* and a novel, *Ramona*, about the tottering Spanish society and the Indians victimized by gringo usurpers.

Sarah Pratt Carr (1850-1935) Born in Maine, her family moved to California when she was an infant. Because of her father's job building railroads, Sarah grew up in frontier settlements and saw the treatment of Chinese workers and the conflicts between settlers and Indians. Under the guidance of the Oakland minister, the Rev. Charles Wendte, Sarah was ordained and organized and served Unitarian churches in the San Joaquin Valley. After she moved to Seattle, she wrote the libretto for an opera for which her daughter, Mary Carr Moore, composed the music. *Narcissa, or The Cost of Empire* told the story of the conquest of the West, with equal sympathy for the missionaries, immigrant settlers, and indigenous people caught in the clash of cultures.

Florence Ellen Kollock Crooker (1848-1925) Born in a log house in Wisconsin, she grew up reading Universalist journals and discussing them with her father. Upon the advice of Mary Livermore, she attended St. Lawrence University and was ordained in 1877. She served a congregations all over the country for over 40 years, helping them to develop strong leadership.

As President of the Women's Ministerial Conference, she was often asked to explain why women should be ministers. She worked throughout her life to pave the way for women to follow their true callings.

Mila Frances Tupper Maynard (1864-1926) Born in Iowa, was nurtured and fostered in her ministry by her sister, the Rev. Eliza Tupper Wilkes, who was first ordained as a Universalist and then became a Unitarian. Mila served congregations in Indiana and Michigan, where she met her husband. Together they served churches in Nevada and Utah. During their ministry in Salt Lake City, the First Unitarian Church grew to over 350 members. Much of Mila's later career was devoted to writing and lecturing in behalf of social and economic justice. She eventually became part of the Christian Socialist movement.

Aurelia Isabel Henry Reinhardt (1877-1948) A native Californian, she became president of Mills College. Through nearly 30 years of leadership, she built the school into a women's liberal arts college for women with a worldwide reputation. She was a lay preacher at the Unitarian Church in Oakland and served on the first Commission on Appraisal, helping to heal a major denominational split with her essay on worship. She lectured and wrote extensively on education for women and on peace, suffrage, and other issues of the day.

Eleanor Silver Dowding Keeping (1903-1991) Known as Silver, she was born in England and came to Western Canada at the age of six. Although partially deaf from the age of 12, she managed to earn a Master of Science degree in botany and become an instructor and lecturer in that subject at the University of Alberta. She completed her PhD in mycology. For 20 years she investigated medically important fungi and worked to interest physicians and public health workers in the importance of medical mycology. Silver and her husband were founding members of the Unitarian Church in Edmonton. For many years, bits of prose and poetry appeared in the church newsletter under the title "*Silverisms*."

Billie Rose King Wright (1922-1987) Born in Mississippi, she was ordained in Anchorage, Alaska, in 1971. She and her minister-husband went as a research team for the National Endowment for the Humanities, to study value formation among indigenous people one hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle. They returned to their 12 by 12 foot cabin on a mountain lake again and again over the next two decades and established a wilderness retreat in the Sierra Ancha Mountains in Arizona. Billie Wright's personal journey of self-reliance and inner harmony led her to the wilderness of Alaska and Arizona.

Malvina Reynolds (1900-1978) One of the most outspoken songwriters on the crucial topics of the 1960s and 70s, the native Californian turned to songwriting after earning a PhD in English Literature and having a full career as a mother and newspaperwoman. Active in the Berkeley Unitarian Fellowship, she was at first too shy to perform her own songs and gave them to fellow Unitarian Pete Seeger and others to sing. Finally, in her 60s, she began to perform publicly, explaining that her cracked and crotchety voice was to be expected—"with all the fallout in the atmosphere."