

# UUWF HISTORY: PART I

## Predecessor Organizations

Compiled in August 2007 by Ellen Spencer, Executive Administrator, and Phyllis Rickter, President 1987-91, with thanks to the Rev. Elinor Artman for permission to use excerpts from her Timeline.

Superscript numbers referred to end notes beginning on page 3.

### SUMMARY

- 1869** Universalist women form the **Women's Aid and Centenary Association**. Between then and 1939, the organization undergoes restructuring and renaming four times before becoming the Association of Universalist Women (AUW).
- Programs:** Missionary work in Japan<sup>1</sup> and the British Isles; schools for African American children in the American South (decades before the 1960s civil rights movement). Raises funds to support weak parishes, ministerial students, disabled ministers and ministers' widows and orphans; fosters Sunday Schools; publishes and distributes denominational literature.
- In 1921 the women purchase the N. Oxford, MA, farm where Universalist Clara Barton was born and establish the Clara Barton Birthplace Museum; they later operate children's camping programs on the grounds.<sup>2</sup>
- 1880** Unitarian women form the **Women's Auxiliary Conference**. Between then and 1960, the organization undergoes restructuring and renaming five times before becoming the Alliance of Unitarian Women (the Alliance).<sup>3</sup>
- Programs:** Leadership training; religious education, and various activities aimed at supporting strong churches.
- Late 1950s** AUW and the Alliance begin joint activities, including publication of *The Bridge*, and begin planning consolidation of their organizations.
- 1963** The AUW and Alliance consolidate<sup>4</sup> into a non-profit membership organization incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, known as: the **Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation**.
- Among the assets UUWF acquires with consolidation are a number of restricted funds and the N. Oxford, MA, property (then about 100 acres). Lively discussion during the consolidation process results in the agreement that UUWF will continue to operate the museum and camp.

UUWF sets up its office on the third floor of 25 Beacon Street, in the former offices of the Alliance (space allotted to them by the UUA in recognition for the funds the Alliance contributed toward the building's construction).

## UUWF'S PREDECESSOR ORGANIZATIONS: DETAIL

**Note:** As noted earlier both the Universalist and Unitarian women's organizations changed their names several times prior to consolidation into the UUWF. To distinguish between the two, in the text that follows material referring to the Unitarian women's organization is italicized.

- 1869** During 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Universalism in America, the **Women's Centenary Aid Association** formed as temporary organization to raise \$35,000 to support the extension of Universalism.
- 1871** The Universalist women organize permanently as **Women's Centenary Association**. It raises funds to support weak parishes, ministerial students, disabled ministers and ministers' widows and orphans; fosters Sunday Schools; publishes and distributes denominational literature; conducts domestic and foreign missionary work.
- 1880** *Women's Auxiliary Conference* formed to encourage women in local churches to organize and participate in denominational extension. Organization supports church construction, extension of Unitarianism. It is originally not independent – its funds are managed by American Unitarian Association.
- 1890** *National Alliance of Unitarian and Other Liberal Christian Women* formed as an independent organization. The Alliance underwrites the costs of some traveling preachers; raises money for college scholarships for Unitarian girls, theological schools, ministers' pensions and widows; publishes program materials for members.
- 1905** Universalist women rename their organization the **Women's National Missionary Association of the Universalist Church**. It operates missions in Japan and the southern United States and service projects in China. The Association also works in support of the League of Nations, prohibition, prison reform, protective legislation for women and children, and world peace.
- 1913** *Alliance drops "National" from name in recognition of Canadian branches; evening alliances are begun for business and professional women. The Alliance begins employing staff and makes major financial contribution toward construction costs of American Unitarian Association's new building at 25 Beacon Street (1915).*
- 1921** Association purchases N. Oxford, MA, farm where Universalist Clara Barton was born; it founds a museum memorializing Barton's life in the house (Birthplace) and operates a camp for underprivileged children on grounds.

- 1926** *To avoid confusion with local branches (called Alliances), the continental organization becomes the **General Alliance of Unitarian and Other Liberal Christian Women.***
- 1932** Association responds to diabetes specialist Dr. Eliot P. Joslin’s call for “islands of safety for diabetic children” by opening the Clara Barton Camp for Diabetic Girls on N. Oxford property.
- 1939** Association renamed **Association of Universalist Women.** Revised mission: supporting women in expressing faith in service, prayer. Begins employing staff. After World War II it discontinues work in Far East and continues operating the Clara Barton Camp and Birthplace Museum as its primary service projects.
- 1950s** AUW and the Alliance begin joint activities, including publication of *The Bridge*, and start planning consolidation of their organizations.
- 1960** *Alliance renamed **Alliance of Unitarian Women.***
- 1963** **Unitarian Universalist Women’s Federation formed** through consolidation<sup>5</sup> of the Association of Universalist Women and the Alliance of Unitarian Women

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<sup>1</sup>Story 1: The AUW’s primary mission in Japan was the Blackmer School for Girls in Tokyo. Its mission was the rescue of Japanese girls whose families would otherwise sell them into domestic slavery or to brothels (not to be confused with girls who trained to be Geisha). Rescued girls in the Blackmer School were educated and trained to become good Japanese wives; the school helped arrange marriages for older students.

Minutes from an AUW board meeting in 1942 report that salaries to several Universalist women from the United States who were employed at the Blackmer School had been discontinued, since they “had not been heard from since December 1941.” Postwar minutes report that the women survived the war in internment camps but that one of them “had gone over to the Catholics.”

<sup>2</sup>Story 2. In 1852, when Tufts College opened under Universalist sponsorship in Medford, MA, only men were admitted. Some years later the president announced that a fund of \$100,000 would open the school to women. In 1886, at a meeting of the Massachusetts state convention of the Universalist women’s organization, Cornelia B. Skinner proposed that the women could do a great and enduring work if they would “join heart and hand in raising the \$100,000 required to open the college to women.” The women overwhelmingly accepted the proposal. Mrs. Skinner died soon afterward and left her camel’s hair shawl and her diamond ring to be converted into money to become the nucleus of the fund.

<sup>3</sup>Story 3. The first Unitarian women’s organization (Women’s Auxiliary Conference) was not truly independent, as its funds were managed by the American Unitarian Association. When Unitarian women did organize independently in 1890, the AUA resisted release of the Conference funds to the new organization and engaged an attorney to investigate whether or not the women could legally hold and manage their own funds. It turned out they could, and they did.

<sup>4</sup>Story 4. For some reason lost in the mists of time, the AUW was originally incorporated in the District of Columbia, where incorporation requires an act of Congress. As the AUW and the Alliance prepared to consolidate, they learned that another act of Congress was required to permit consolidation. Their

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attorney, Henry Winslow, assured the women that this was a routine procedure, and they authorized him to proceed with it.

A few days prior to the May 1963 meeting where representatives of the AUW and the Alliance were to officially vote the new, consolidated organization into existence, Winslow, going through his check list, discovered that although Congress had passed the enabling legislation, the President had not yet signed it into law. He advised the women to proceed with the meeting and the vote, but cautioned them that another meeting might be needed and another vote taken after the legislation was signed, to remove any shadow of doubt about the consolidation's legality.

Uneasy about this, the women contacted Rev. Dana Greeley, then president of the UUA (itself recently formed) to ask his help. Greeley, being well-connected, reached out to people he knew in Washington and finally located someone who personally knew the President. Thus, during an early May weekend John F. Kennedy was called away from his television set, where he was watching coverage of the Mercury 9 space shot (an early U.S. manned flight in outer space) to sign the enabling legislation.

Subsequent enabling legislation was also passed by the Massachusetts legislature, which is why attorneys believe that any change in UUWF's legal status may require a petition to the Great and General Courts (official name for the Massachusetts legislature).

<sup>5</sup> Because the word *merger* often conveys the image of a larger entity "taking over" a smaller one, the women preferred to use the word *consolidation*.