



# SWUWWorld

*Women Helping Women  
Lighting the Way to Possibilities*

## Newsletter of Southwest UU Women

6720 Brentwood Stair Road, Fort Worth, Texas 76112 swuuw@hotmail.com <http://www.swuuw.com>

Volume 2004 Summer Issue

### SWUW at SWUUSI

SWUW presents Lunches Plus at SWUUSI - To volunteer contact Gino Kennedy at [kennedy@tarleton.edu](mailto:kennedy@tarleton.edu) or 254-968-7670.

SWUW business meeting at SWUUSI on Wednesday, July 28

Agenda for SWUW Business meeting:

- Up date on Affiliation Status with UUA
- SWUW's role at GA 2005 in Fort Worth
- SWUW's role in the Women's Conferences

Do plan to attend whether you are a member of SWUW or not. We want input from everyone as we probe and plan SWUW's future.

### MARY BILLINGS—TEXAS' FIRST UU WOMAN

Connecticut to Texas:

Mary Charlotte Ward Granniss Webster Billings (1824-1904)  
Universalist Writer, Missionary, Minister

Mary Billings was the first woman ordained to Universalist ministry in Texas. She attained this honor in 1892, at the age of sixty-eight. Hailing from Connecticut, where she spent the first sixty years of her life, Mary lived her final two decades in Hico, Texas, then a town of about two thousand people west of Waco. Mary and her missionary husband James Billings established the mission center of the Texas Universalist movement in Hico. All through her life, those who knew her described Mary as a kind, generous woman. Her entire life, she was devoted to serving her Universalist faith through the changing cultural and religious spheres open to women across the course of the nineteenth century.

When I started seminary in 1998 on a path to Unitarian Universalist ministry, I wanted to know more about early Unitarians and Universalists in Texas. I frequently saw Mary Billings' name in the record books, but could not find much about her in published histories. Finally I understood that her three marriages and subsequent name changes during her life had something to do with her falling through the cracks of our history. My pursuit of Mary's life story these past five years has been a spiritual journey for me: in getting to know Mary Billings, I have found connections to many other Universalists in our liberal heritage. Better yet, by uncovering Mary's story through women's eyes, I have learned much about this fascinating woman who otherwise would probably remain overlooked by history.

Mary Charlotte Ward was born in Litchfield, Connecticut, in 1824. The fourteenth of sixteen children, Mary valued strong family connections, which informed her view of both life and religion. Most of her ancestors were settled in Connecticut and are traceable back six or seven generations to England in the late sixteenth century. Even though the Presbyterian church was the official church of Connecticut after the Revolution, many of Mary's family were members of the Episcopal church.

Mary perhaps acquired some of her free-spirited views

*(Continued on page 6)*

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**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

Dear Members—

I want to thank all the great women who have been working with me on the expanded SWUUV board this year. In particular, I would like to thank Gino Kennedy who is such a great asset to SWUUV. She has worked on so many projects including SWUUSI lunches, which she is preparing to do again this summer. Elizabeth Muller, President Elect, will be helping her in part by getting speakers for the PLUS part of lunches. If you have a program idea or a speaker to suggest, please pass it along to Elizabeth (elizmuller@aol.com).

By the time you read this there will be an outcome to our quest to gain status as an independent affiliate of the UUA. This will allow us to sponsor two workshops at General Assembly in Fort Worth in 2005. SWUUV board member Brenda Baldwin is also pursuing the idea of a SWUUV-sponsored reception at General Assembly in Fort Worth to help us raise visibility of our organization and its goals.

I am quite amazed by how much work SWUUV takes by its board members. Now that we are a non-profit we need to keep our books in good order. Amy Youngblood is our Treasurer and has recently even gotten us a credit card. But all this adds additional responsibilities for the management of our funds. We have hired a CPA to look over our books and records and file our taxes. I am happy to say we were able to find a UU woman who is an accountant and who first joined her UU congregation after having attended a SWUUV conference.

I have become more and more convinced of the need for SWUUV. I sponsored a march for women's lives here in Houston to parallel the one occurring in Washington, D.C. There were over 100 marchers here, in the rain. It was fairly last minute, and while I was not the only organizer, I was a primary one and I felt that it would not have occurred had I not gotten involved.

This experience has made me question my assumption that there were others minding the store on women's issues.

*(Continued on page 3)*

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## 2005 CONFERENCE UPDATE

Sisterhood is Still Powerful! Anyone who comes to Conference knows the strong sister energy we generate. We chose this theme to celebrate who we are, and to welcome our 2005 keynote speaker, Margot Adler. Currently an NPR correspondent based in New York City, Margot hosts the weekly show, *Justice Talking*. She is also the author of **Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers and Other Pagans in America Today**, and a memoir, **Heretic's Heart: a Journey through Spirit and Revolution**. Ever since her formative political experiences at Berkeley in the 1960s, Margot has forged a meaningful life examining all that is controversial in our culture. This includes but is not limited to the death penalty, affirmative action, the influence technology has on children, the digital divide, debates over family values, and stories of New York City post 9/11. Her programs go to the heart of what it means to live in a democracy (quoting from her NPR bio). Margot was also instrumental in the movement to add an Earth-centered statement to the list of sources our UU religion is based on. We are thrilled to have such a dynamic speaker headlining our Houston conference. Mark your calendars now for February 4 – 6, 2005!

When Laura Nagel and I last spoke with Margot, she was just back from New Hampshire, where she had conducted a Croning ritual for 35 women. More good news: Margot will design the opening and closing rituals for our Conference! Priestess energy galore, honoring women of all ages – this is the seed energy for what we envision.

At this time we are beginning to confirm workshops for the 2005 conference. Included will be topics such as: permaculture, Native American Medicine cards, "Yoga for the Rest of Us" with Peggy Cappy, a Labyrinth walk, Dances of Universal Peace, and many other social justice, spiritual and artistic programs. Nor will the 21 Praises of Tara be a thing of the past – Elizabeth Muller will present a program to reacquaint us with this delightful spiritual practice.

We continue to be excited about our location for Conference. The Warwick Hotel has got to be Houston's classiest place to stay. I am sure we will cut a groove unlike any the hotel has seen before. In closing I would like to welcome you in advance by saying: If you are coming to Houston, Texas – be sure and wear some flowers in your hair!

-- Keddy Ann Outlaw  
SWUW Secretary

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To make a difference is not a matter of accident, a matter of casual occurrence of the tides. People choose to make a difference.

■ -- Maya Angelou

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Advancing the cause of women's rights, promoting equity and fairness for women, providing a platform for women's voices are still important issues where SWUW is needed and can make a difference.

We continue to strategize on how to make hosting a conference easier to do and want to encourage those of you considering planning a conference. Elizabeth and I can help you with the arrangements. We are looking for a site for the 2006 conference. If you have ideas or want additional information, please contact Elizabeth or me ([lauranagel@sbcglobal.net](mailto:lauranagel@sbcglobal.net)).

-- Laura Nagel  
President

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## MEET YOUR OFFICERS

### **Keddy Ann Outlaw, Secretary**

I only just turned officially UU around my 50th birthday in the year 2000. Before that, I had no name for my own idiosyncratic homespun form of spirituality. My main muse was always Art of some kind: poems, pots, collages, bread, soup, a garden or a log cabin. Post college, I went "back to the land" in upstate New York with some of my living theater friends. After a prolonged and rather earthy adolescence, I became a public librarian and moved to Texas. I've always had a sense of the sacred feminine, and an interest in Native America. I was fascinated to find a group of women at First Church in Houston who study Jamie Sams' books about the medicine cards, a group called Changing Women. Walking labyrinths became another spiritual practice, one that I find to be both healing and profound.

I attended my first SWUW conference in Austin in 2003. I was drawn to the workshop topics, and once I got there, I loved the eclectic ambience as well as the wildness and wisdom of our group of women. Since I had recently helped plan a large library conference, I thought it would be fun to work with SWUW on their Houston conference. As I write this, my work with the board has just begun, but I feel both energized and honored to be involved!

### **Elizabeth Muller, President-elect**

Being in an executive role is somewhat of a new experience for me. I am now or have been a multimedia artist, graphic designer, gallery owner, elementary school teacher, theater techie (lighting), but always will be a dancer. Dance in many guises has formed the design of my life. Early on it was tap, ballet and jazz from a small town teacher, then modern dance in college with a wonderful life changing mentor and, later, in a small company in the San Francisco Bay Area. Along the way, I've sampled many other movement forms, including folk, African, Middle Eastern, therapeutic,

meditative, improvisational, as well as T'ai Chi and yoga.

My childhood in the Mississippi Delta was a blend of dancing lessons, horseback riding and family time at her grandmother's home. After college (BA, Special Education, Mississippi State College for Women, 1970), I left the South for the West. After living in Arizona, Nevada, California and Wyoming before I settled down in Oklahoma (BA, Visual Art and Design, University of Central Oklahoma, 1991) where I live with my husband, two minidachshunds, a corgi and a cat. I also have two grown sons and in December became a grandmother!

Since 1984, I've worked with Theatre Upon a StarDanceSwan and its director Lorrie Keller. The company is a unique union of children and adults who come together in mutual respect to experience the magic of creativity, the excitement of theater, and the expressiveness of the human body. Attendees of the previous OKC conference saw them perform in the labyrinth on the opening evening. Both of my sons have had their lives enriched by performing with StarDanceSwan.

At a gathering to celebrate the Harmonic Convergence in 1989, I was introduced to the Dances of Universal Peace (sometimes called Sufi dances), a way of honoring the spiritual validity of the diverse religions through simple movements and sacred phrases. Years of training followed, and now I am a certified leader of the Dances through PeaceWorks, International Network for the Dances of Universal Peace. It was through the Dances that I came to know Anahata and Prema who were the theme purveyors of the OKC Conference.

I have been a Unitarian Universalist for 19 years. As the Convenor of the 2004 Conference, I will be the board liaison and consultant for those who are interested in hosting future conferences. Because of the increasing magnitude and financial risk of producing a conference, the SWUW board is interested in exploring ways to take on more of the responsibilities of our annual party. More about that later!

## REMAKING IRAQ WITHOUT GUNS

By IRSHAD MANJI

TORONTO, June 5, 2004 When the heads of the world's leading industrialized nations meet in Georgia next week, they can do something unexpectedly positive for the Middle East, Muslim women, economic freedom and even democracy - if they take seriously a small but powerful idea on their agenda: microlending in Iraq. It's obvious by now that the reconstruction of Iraq demands long-term thinking, which means using non-military "soft power" as much as hard ammunition. One of the best ways to achieve stability is by offering tiny loans to promote the creation of small businesses. Iraq has no dearth of budding entrepreneurs who could use the help. Chief among them are women, who have shown themselves able and eager to take on more roles.

An investment in Muslim women benefits men and children too. Testifying to this multiplier effect are the signs in some Afghan schools: "Educate a boy and you educate that boy; educate a girl and you educate her entire family." Indeed, the 30-year record of microlending shows that Muslim women have helped nourish their neighborhoods and towns by building their own businesses. As for the repayment rate? A banker's fantasy fulfilled: 98 percent.

With that in mind, suppose Washington joined a coalition of rich allies around the world - the Group of 8 nations as well as private foundations - to offer women in Iraq a coherent program of microbusiness loans. Pursuing this type of soft power could also compel government transparency in a way that even popular movements couldn't. Only a broad and inclusive business class that can be taxed by the state will, in turn, convince the state to develop institutions that respond to people. Americans know this principle better than anybody: it's called representation with taxation. This approach to re-building Iraq could also help heal the rift between the United States and much of the European Union. International agencies have recognized that women are the great untapped resource in the Arab Middle East.

The United Nations' Arab Human Development Reports - written by Arabs -

consistently emphasize three deficits in the Arab Muslim world: women's empowerment, knowledge and freedom. By putting a dent in the deficit of Iraqi women's empowerment, we can begin closing the gaps in knowledge and freedom. The World Bank appears to agree. While he was its chief economist, Nicholas Stern said that "increasing gender equality is as central to the idea of development as freedom." When women get involved, he added, "education, health, productivity, credit and governance work better." In short, there's less corruption - a saving grace for a fledgling democracy like Iraq.

But the looming question remains: does Islam permit women to be entrepreneurs? In theory, yes. The prophet Muhammad's first beloved wife, Khadija, was a wealthy self-made merchant. For years, he worked for her - something that Muslim men should be open to doing if they're serious about emulating Muhammad's life. Those Muslims who cite religion to oppose women as economic agents do so not because they fear violating the faith, but because they fear losing comfortable cultural certitudes and personal privileges.

More sophisticated Muslims will argue that introducing free enterprise to the Arab Middle East amounts to Western imperialism, regardless of whether women benefit. That, too, is nonsense. The most tolerant strains of Islam have been spread through merchant trade rather than military conquest. Capitalism has such a noble history in Islam that an old saying goes, "May your pilgrimage be accepted, your sins be forgiven, and your merchandise not remain unsold."

Theology and modernity can meet in today's Iraq as they did a thousand years ago when Baghdad, the seat of the Islamic enlightenment, served as a crossroads of commerce. Iraq is precisely the place from which to remind Arab Muslims of their storied history, a golden age built upon the exchange of ideas as much as goods. However, to help Arab Muslims rediscover that glory, or anything close to it, America and the world will need to think bigger

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toward religion from one of her great-grandfathers, the Rev. Solomon Palmer. Palmer came to Litchfield in 1751 as the town's first Episcopal minister, after abruptly denouncing the Presbyterian church in which he had served for two decades.

Mary was lucky to grow up in Litchfield. The fourth largest town in Connecticut at the time and a 'safe zone' during the Revolution, Litchfield was a center of cultural and industrial prominence. Major north-south and east-west stage lines also intersected in the town, connecting Litchfield residents with Boston, New York City, Hartford, and the western frontier. One of the country's first private schools for girls, the Litchfield Female Academy, operated there for nearly forty years and attracted students from around the country. The school's presence created a supportive attitude for women overall in the town. Six of Mary's brothers and sister attended the Academy for at least one semester. The school closed before Mary was old enough to enroll, but there were several other schools in Litchfield that she might have attended. However, around the age of twelve, Mary was removed from formal schooling. Because many of her siblings had died young, her parents preferred to let her 'roam free' of institutional constraints.

Mary was taught instead by the beautiful countryside of northwestern Connecticut. During these formative teenage years she also learned about Universalism from an older brother, who was converted to the faith when he heard a prominent Universalist preacher, the Rev. Menzies Rayner, in Hartford. Since there was no Universalist congregation in Litchfield, nominally she remained on the books of St. Michael's Episcopal Church until she moved to Hartford in 1851.

Mary married three times. Her first marriage was to silk merchant Frederick Granniss. They lived a good life. Granniss ran a millinery establishment, and they were active in the Hartford Universalist church. They enjoyed an extended tour of Europe in 1859-60. After their return from Europe, they built a beautiful home in West Hartford. Unfortunately, Granniss was sick during much of their

marriage. Mary was his caretaker through his death in 1866. The couple had no children, making it possible for her to also find time to write and publish extensively. She was a regular contributor to Universalist magazines such as the Ladies Repository and the Lily of the Valley. Among her writings from this period are short fictional stories, poems, hymns, a travel log of their European travels, and one book. Content to exist within the domestic spheres proper to women of this period, Mary expressed many of the theological views through these writings, since the role of public preacher was not yet open to women.

In 1869 Mary married a Universalist minister, the Rev. Charles Henry Webster, who was serving as one of the state missionaries in Connecticut. After their marriage, Webster gave up ministry and opened a stationery store in Hartford. Their home was in Rocky Hill, today a suburb, back then a separate town about ten miles south of Hartford. While Webster moved away from church work, Mary transitioned toward public ministry. She began to appear in pulpits as a lay preacher, mentored by other Universalist women ministers in Connecticut such as Olympia Brown and Phoebe Hanaford. Mary was also honored by E.R. Hanson in *Our Woman Workers* (1881), a collection of biographies of notable Universalist women. During these years Mary also was supported by various women's networks, including the Women's Centenary Association and the Women's Ministerial Conference. Mary again suffered hardship: Webster also died relatively young, in 1877.

The census of 1880 indicates that Mary was still living in Rocky Hill. Indeed, Mary could well have remained in Connecticut, where she was well-connected and well-respected through family and church. Instead, in 1885 she traveled to Waco, Texas, where she married Rev. James Billings. James was the new Universalist missionary to Texas. Born in New York State, James had visited Texas in the 1870s, hoping the climate would improve the health of his first wife. After her death, and trying to be in retirement up north, James, already in his seventies, decided to return to Texas, where he saw a great need for committed missionary work. Mary helped him in

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that work.

In Texas, Mary moved into the public sphere of ministry. She and James worked tirelessly to grow Universalism in a state that was not particularly welcoming of liberal religion. Together they established the Texas Universalist Convention, which held its first meeting in 1886, and personally filled nearly every office in that organization. At the Convention meeting in 1892, Mary was finally ordained as a minister of the Universalist church. She was also the official correspondent from the Texas Convention:

Mary's articles and reports about the state can be found in nearly every issue of Universalist journals, such as the Universalist Herald, published during her ministry in Texas. After James died in 1898, Mary even took over some of his circuit preaching duties around the state.

James and Mary also established the Universalist congregation of Hico and built a modest church. They also established their personal homestead in Hico, where they were savvy real estate speculators as the new Texas Central Railway pushed westward through the town. Most Universalist congregations were located in rural areas, in the eastern third of the state. There were few permanent buildings for Universalists in the state. Meeting sites included town halls, campsites, and revival tents borrowed from other religious movements. One congregation even met in a cotton gin.

Mary and James met many challenges. Universalism was considered a heresy by most Texans in mainstream religion. Relatively speaking, the number of Universalists in the state always remained low. Serving primarily an agricultural population, congregations came and went, many after only a few years, subject

to the vagaries of extreme heat, cold, rain, and even snow. Furthermore, being a woman preacher was almost unheard of in the southwest, so some came to hear Mary preach for the novelty of it all. Mary remained kind and accepting of all, no matter their misconceptions of women or liberal religion. She once reported that she even had faith in the inherent goodness of the cowboys. But she also spoke up strongly in matters of social action: for equal pay for women and for animal rights, against alcohol, against the death penalty, and against war. In spite of all these challenges, during the Billings years, Universalist congregations and membership in the Lone Star State increased significantly.

During her final years, Mary enjoyed the companionship of one Francis Skinner, another Hartford resident transposed to Texas who was with Mary when she died. After her death, Mary Billings was celebrated in numerous newspapers and magazines. One Universalist writer referred to her passing as a 'death-knell' for Universalism in Texas. The Texas Convention managed to keep going for another twenty-five years, but never with the same vigor as during the Billings' period. The final convention was held in 1929. Mary was survived by at least four nieces and one nephew. James Billings had three sons, one of whom lived in Hico for a period and married a woman, Rachel Dallgren, who was also ordained to the Universalist ministry.

Knowing Mary's history and the history of other women of liberal religious spirit who have come before us here in the southwest matters. We all need to remember the women of our congregations by writing their histories. A workshop on this subject has been proposed for GA 2005.

Blessings to all, Barbara Coeyman

*(Continued from page 5)*

than elections. Drafting a democratic constitution for Iraq is important, but it's hardly enough to ensure meaningful democracy. Let's remember that Hitler became chancellor of Germany through free and fair elections. He did so by feeding off stubborn tribalism, economic malaise and resentment over military defeat. Iraq has the potential to incubate all three viruses, plus the remnants of a Baath Party built on the Nazi model. That's why more lasting solutions lie in long-term thinking. And in the women of Iraq.

Irshad Manji is the author of "The Trouble with Islam: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith." <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/06/05/opinion/05MANJ.html?>

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**  
Southwest Unitarian Universalist Women

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