

# Prophetic Women of Unitarian Universalism

**Frances Dana Barker Gage (1808-1884)** was a Universalist, a lecturer, activist, novelist and journalist who was passionate about rights for women and for the abolition of slavery. Gage exchanged views about Universalism with Clara Barton during the Civil War, while they both served on the Sanitation Commission at Paris Island and at Hilton Head.

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**Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)**. Although strictly neither a Unitarian nor a Universalist, Stanton worked with many notable Unitarians and Universalists of her time. She was one of the organizers of the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls. She organized and co-edited a book of liberal women's biblical commentary, "The Women's Bible," with three Universalist ministers: Phebe Hanaford, Augusta Chapin, and Olympia Brown.

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**Lucy Stone (1818-1893)** was a noted Unitarian feminist and abolitionist, known as the first woman to keep her own name after marriage (to Henry Blackwell).

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**Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910)** was a Unitarian author, poet, abolitionist, women's rights and peace activist. Most famous for writing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and the Mother's Day Proclamation, she was unsuccessful in her attempts to promote an international Women's Peace Congress.

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**Mary Livermore (1820-1905)** was a Universalist with considerable talent at organizing. She was a highly sought lecturer, known as "The Queen of the Platform."

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**Florence Nightingale (1820-1910)** was born to British Unitarian parents and credited with the foundation of modern nursing following her experiences with the Crimean War. She had many connections to American Unitarians.

**Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906)** was born a Quaker and later became a Unitarian. She was the most famous public voice of the early women's rights movement, and was arrested for casting a vote in the 1872 presidential election.

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**Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910) and Emily Blackwell (1826-1910)** were Unitarian sisters and the first two women to graduate from medical school in 1849. They were sisters-in-law to Lucy Stone and Rev. Antoinette Brown Blackwell.

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**Louisa May Alcott (1823-1888)** was a Unitarian best known as a writer of *Little Women*. She was associated with the Transcendentalists and served as a nurse during the Civil War.

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**Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825-1911)** attended both AME and Unitarian churches in Philadelphia. She was a writer, lecturer and activist, a free-born African American woman who worked for abolition and women's rights.

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**Rev. Olympia Brown (1835-1926)** was a Universalist minister, and in 1863 became the first woman ordained within an organized denomination in the United States. Toward the end of her career, she preached for peace during World War I.

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**May Wright Sewall (1844-1920)** was a Unitarian women's rights activist and reformer.

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**Anna Garlin Spencer (1851-1931)** was a Free Religionist associated with the Unitarians. She was the first woman to give the Berry Street lecture in 1929 (the oldest lecture series on the North American continent, dedicated to furthering liberal religion). She was married to a Unitarian minister, and was herself a minister (non-affiliated).

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**Lucia Ames Mead (1856-1936)**, although not a Unitarian, had friendships and working relationships with many Unitarian peace activists. She was a leading pacifist and social reformer.

**Harriet Stanton Blatch (1856-1940)** was born in Seneca Falls, became a Unitarian, and was a key player in the push to ratify women's right to vote in 1920. After her first-hand experiences in Europe following WWI, she wrote "A Woman's Point of View — Some Roads to Peace."

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**Alice Stone Blackwell (1857-1950).** A Unitarian, and daughter of Lucy Stone, she was instrumental in the reconciliation between the National Women's Suffrage Association and the American Women's Suffrage Association, who had split because of differing views on issues and tactics, primarily around race, following the Civil War. She was the editor of the Women's Journal for thirty-five years.

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**Carrie Clinton Lane Chapman Catt (1859-1947),** a Unitarian, was a reformer, women's rights activist, pacifist, and organizer of the League of Women Voters.

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**Jane Addams (1860-1935)** was born a Quaker, but attended Unitarian services in Chicago. She was the founder of Hull House, one of the first "settlement houses" providing services for working class women and men. She was a founding member of the ACLU, and she was also the first U.S. woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931 for her international peacemaking efforts.

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**Emily Greene Balch (1867-1961)** was a Unitarian who became a Quaker after the AUA refused to support pacifist ministers. She was a delegate in 1915 at the International Congress of Women at The Hague. An ardent pacifist, she met with Woodrow Wilson, promoting the concept of mediation between nations. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 for her work

## Dorothea Dix (from UUA resource)



Dorothea Dix lived in the 1800s. At a time when women had fewer choices than men did, Dorothea made extraordinary choices for herself. She did not grow up a Unitarian, but she chose to become one as an adult. Another choice she made was to work hard on behalf of other people.

Dorothea made one of the most important contributions to our society by helping to create hospitals for people with mental illness. In her time, there were no hospitals for people with mental problems. People who acted strange or could not communicate because they had difficulty thinking and interacting the same way most others did, were kept in prisons. Often they were chained and given very little clothing. So what if it was cold in the prison? Nobody cared whether these people were cold. Most people thought people with mental illness did not get cold or feel pain. In fact, many people thought that those with mental illness were not fully human at all.

What gave Dorothea Dix a different idea about them? Maybe it was some of her own troubles that made her think more compassionately.

Dorothea Lynde Dix was born on April 4, 1802 in the town of Hampden, Maine. She was the oldest of three children born to Joseph Dix and Mary Bigelow Dix. Dorothea's mother was often sick and her father was not very nice to his family. He often hit his wife and children. The family moved a lot, from Maine to Massachusetts and finally Vermont. When she was 12 years old, her grandmother sent for Dorothea and her two younger brothers to come live with her in Boston. Dorothea's grandmother was wealthy and she expected Dorothea to behave in a certain way. Dorothea only wanted to care for her younger brothers. She was not interested in learning to be a "lady" which at that time meant taking lessons in how to behave in society.

It took time for Dorothea to learn and understand how to "behave." But one thing that she did very well, and loved in fact, was to read books and study. It was unusual at the time for a young girl to know how to read and write, but Dorothea's father, a Methodist minister, had taught her. Even though he was difficult as a father, he did teach her something valuable.

As Dorothea grew up, her grandmother was very strict and very concerned about her status in society. When Dorothea became involved in opening a school for poor children, she wanted to use her grandmother's barn as the school. Dorothea was so worried her

grandmother would not let her teach the poor, especially in her own barn, that she wrote her a letter to ask permission. Dorothea's grandmother said yes right away and Dorothea spent years as a teacher.

Dorothea was religious, attending her grandmother's Congregationalist church every Sunday. One day, Dorothea decided to visit the Unitarian church where Dr. William Ellery Channing was speaking. What she heard that day changed her life forever. She heard Dr. Channing preach that God was love and we are all a part of that love and we are called to show that love to others. This was very different from the sermons she heard in her own church. Dorothea became a Unitarian. After she got to know Dr. Channing, he offered her a job helping to care for his children. She lived with the Channing family for six months, traveling with them and tutoring the Channing children.

When Dorothea was in her forties, she visited a women's prison and saw women in chains with no clothes on. When she asked why, the prison matron told her those people were mentally ill and didn't understand anyway. Dorothea was appalled. She was so upset, she called her friends in the Massachusetts government to tell them. They told her they would need a written report before they could act. Dorothea went to every prison in Massachusetts and wrote a detailed report about the conditions for the mentally ill in each one. With her reports, Massachusetts began to open hospitals that treated the mentally ill with respect and gave them good food and warm clothing.

Dorothea Dix began to travel to other states, investigating conditions in prisons, filing reports, and testifying before state legislatures. Some of the hospitals she started still stand. So does the view of the mentally ill that she put forth: Even when someone's words or behaviors cannot be understood by others, she remains a person deserving of dignity, respect and love.

Dorothea deeply valued the right to make one's own choices. She trusted her own choices about the right way to live her life. One of her choices was to become a Unitarian. Another was to work to help people with mental illness in ways they were not able to help themselves. She understood they were people whose right to make their own choices had been taken away. She helped everyone understand that people with mental illness are people like us, who deserve dignity and respect.



## Clara Barton (from UUA resource)

Clara Barton was born on Christmas Day, 1821, in Oxford, MA, into a Universalist family.

She was living in Washington, D.C. when the U.S. Civil War landed at her doorstep. She began nursing wounded soldiers in her sister's home, visiting the army camps, and was soon orchestrating the delivery of supplies from numerous Ladies Aid societies. After a short time, she began working on the front lines, delivering supplies and tending to wounded soldiers. Despite occasional bouts of illness, she continued her efforts, working alongside a host of women volunteers that included Dorothea Dix, Frances Dana Barker Gage, and Mary Livermore.

Frances Gage became a close friend, and when Barton expressed frustration at the barriers women faced in her line of work, Gage introduced Barton to the women's rights movement. Barton and Gage also discussed their shared Universalist faith, which they both credited with influencing their work.

After the Civil War ended, Barton visited Europe and learned of the International Red Cross, an organization which had been established by the Geneva Convention. She returned home determined to start an American chapter, struggling against the prevailing political mood to advocate for the organization. In 1881 the American Red Cross was founded, but the first few years of the organization's existence were difficult. Barton's own health was often compromised by overwork, and although she was a passionate advocate for the agency's relief work, her lack of administrative skills often caused problems. She persevered, however, and served as the President of the Red Cross until 1904, when she retired at the age of 83. She died eight years later in 1912. An excerpt from her letter to a friend Frances Gage, written in 1870, provides a glimpse into her faith and insightful moral conviction:

*My Dear Fannie,*

*I can never see a poor mutilated wreck, blown to pieces with powder and lead without wondering if visions of such an end ever flitted before his mother's mind when she washed and dressed her fair skinned baby. Woman should certainly have some voice in the matter of war, either affirmative or negative, and the fact that she has not this should not be made the ground on which to deprive her of other privileges. She shan't say there shall be no war — and she shan't take any part in it when there is one, and because she don't take part in war, she must not vote, and because she can't vote, she has no voice in her government, and because she has no voice in her government, she isn't a citizen, and because she isn't a citizen, she has no rights, and because she has no rights, she must submit to wrongs, and because she submits to wrongs, she isn't anybody, and "what does she know about war— " and because she don't know anything about it, she mustn't say or do anything about it."*