Early History of Unitarians and Universalists in Santa Cruz

I took the early history from Wendy Edgerton whom I did meet, and since I had so little time to tell you about it in the service March 20, here is more to inspire you. For more detail, I refer you to Wendy's book published here in 1993 called, *From These Beginnings, 1866 to 1986, the First One Hundred Twenty Years for Santa Cruz Unitarian Universalists,* available in the Gallery library or on-line.

The history of Unitarianism in California and Santa Cruz parallels the history of California. It was during the presidency of Millard Filmore, a Unitarian himself, that California was incorporated into the Union. 1850 also marked the formation of the Pacific Unitarian Society, and The First Unitarian Society of San Francisco held its first services. San Francisco was the first Unitarian congregation on the west coast. It was primarily made up of New Englanders come to the west coast to seek their fortune in gold and logging. I'm sure you recall 1849 was the year gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill. It was led by a Connecticut minister, Rev. Rufus Putnam Carter followed by the distinguished Rev. Thomas Starr King and later Rev. Horatio Stebbins and his assistant Rev. Charles Gordan Ames who later became the first minister in Santa Cruz.

The second Unitarian church in California was founded in 1866 in Santa Cruz. Many Santa Cruz notables contributed to its founding, including Horace Pope of the Pope House, Richard C. Kirby, a prominent tanner, and the Leask family who went on to create the Leask department store on Pacific Avenue in 1892, but most of the credit for making it happen went to the remarkable Georgiana Bruce Kirby.

She was born in England in 1818 but somehow made it all the way to the new world alone seeking freedom and education. She served as a nursemaid to UU minister Rev. Ezra Stiles Garnett who became her patron in Boston, where he served a church and later became the first president of the American Unitarian Association.

There she read and became a devout Unitarian joining the Transcendentalist community known as Brook Farm, interacting with such notables as Margaret Fuller and Ralph Waldo Emerson. She interacted with such Unitarians as Theodore Parker from whom is descended the Rev. Rebecca Parker who served the Bay Area for many years and spoke here. Georgiana also read widely inclining Channing, but she was part of the liberal wing of the denomination like Parker, anti-slavery, feminist, pacifist, and promoter of temperance and social activism generally. On the east coast, she worked in a woman's prison.

She looked to the west, and with the financial help of Horace Greeley, headed there alone arriving in San Francisco and quickly becoming involved with Starr King and the other Unitarians there at the time. Her goal was Santa Cruz to which she went with another woman crossing the on a mule trail on foot through a mountain pass (now the route of Hwy 17,) because Santa Cruz was land locked at the time. There she married Richard Kirby and with him set up a rancho on the west side (the

house is still there), had five children and labored tirelessly on the farm, sometimes in bloomers, considered shocking at the time, all the while maintaining correspondence with the Unitarian aristocracy mentioned above.

In 1855, she wrote in her diary that she was "taking steps toward procuring liberal Unitarian teachings" for those in SC tired of the "fire and brimstone" teachings of the established churches there and continuing to help the oppressed, especially women. She also raised money ($100 from her husband) totaling $1000, no mean feat at the time.

In 1866 the group achieved its goal of opening the first Unitarian Church here in a wooden building they also constructed called Unity Hall on the site of what is now the Walnut Street Café. They called the Rev. Ames as the first minister. In 1871 she invited and received a visit to Unity Hall of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.
Georgiana became a pillar of SC in other ways as well.

Later All Souls Unitarian Church was built and opened in 1902 for $2500, funded by wealthy Unitarians and Mrs. Frances B. Hackley from Tarrytown, New York. The building now houses the Progressive Baptist Church, a group we collaborated with years ago.

The second moment I want to consider started in 1944. At the time, there were many Unitarian congregations in our country, but there were also isolated people and families seeking Unitarian support for themselves and their children. In response, the American Unitarian Association formed an organization to serve them called the Church of the Larger Fellowship. It was a correspondence course on liberal religion providing news bulletins, national publications such as The Register, sermons, and RE material for kids. Because there was a longing for community among these folks, a lay led Fellowship plan was launched in 1948. The idea went back to 1907, but was not realized until '48, because a shortage of ministers resulted from WW II. The Association wrote a handbook on how to form, operate and conduct those groups and raised money for them.

Nine years later, 1957, a Santa Cruz group in Aptos caught on and decided to form what was then called Sunday Circles, Lay Centers, Fellowship Units, or just Fellowships.

In 1953 a couple named Georgia and Harry Brauer got married in the First Unitarian Society of San Francisco. They moved to Watsonville for Harry to join a law practice, and not knowing about the then dwindling All Souls Church in Santa Cruz, they want all the way to Pacific Grove to feed their spirituality.

In 1956 they circulated the idea among friends, many with young children for whom they wanted religious instruction, that there would be a meeting in the Brauer law office to discuss forming a Unitarian society. 8-10 people showed up including Robert and Beth Bennett, another lawyer family, Jack and Ruth Hamilton, him a Watsonville school teacher, and other Unitarians from far and wide.

They had meetings at the Watsonville Women's Club, and when they began to advertise, the notorious Augusta Trampler of All Souls, who was looking for young blood, came. Thereafter they met at her Rio del Mar home. She became the unofficial leader of the new group, another feminist like Georgiana Bruce Kirby.

Augusta was born in Switzerland on June 18, 1888. Nicknamed, the Owl, she was an avid reader from a young age. She married the astronomer Robert Trumpler, and after World War I, they moved to Pennsylvania for his education. The couple discovered Unitarianism in Pittsburg, shunning the Fire and Brimstone theology of the Calvinism in which they were raised. In 1919, they moved to California for him to work in the Lick Observatory on Mount Hamilton. They participated in the mail course, The Church of the Larger Fellowship. When Robert took a position at UC Berkely, they joined the Berkely Church in Kensington, but when a fellowship split off and settled downtown, the Trumplers helped found the new congregation. This experience helped Augusta help us.

They rented a beach side cottage in Aptos for the kids in summer, and after Pearl Harbor in '43 housing costs plummeted, and they bought it. In 1951, they joined All Souls, which was already flagging. When Robert died in 1956, Augusta felt she needed a place to put her immense energy and brilliant leadership skills. They called her the Mother of the Unitarian Fellowship.

Augusta did all the paperwork, and on July 23, 1957, the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of the American Unitarian Association approved their application to become the Unitarian Fellowship of Santa Cruz County. In December, 22 members signed the membership book, 21 more signed in in 1958. By 1986, 600 people had signed that book which we still have.

At first, they met in Soquel above a bakery, then the 100F Lodge Meeting Hall. They requested from Beacon Street a curriculum for children, and the Rev. Edna Brauer came from Boston to deliver it and help them start a children's program at Augusta's house.

There was some small effort to merge with All Souls, but the former was too focused on their senior citizens to appeal the Aptos group.

Aptos grew and moved to the YWCA building on Walnut Street. Aptos grew as All Souls shrunk, the latter closing its doors in 1971. The Fellowship wanted its own building, but it didn't have the funds.

In 1961, there arose the proposal of merging the Unitarians and the Universalists, the latter floundering but still respected. Other denominations vied for their members, but when we merged, our group became the UUFSCC also in 1961.

In 1963, the UUFSCC put down $1000 for the 3.469 acres upon which we now stand. With pledges, they raised $4500, they got a loan from a member for $2000 at 4.5%, and they got a loan from the bank for $6000 at 6%. With a total of $10,000, they purchased and incorporated the land for the Fellowship building.

The building committee learned an estimate to build would be $50,000, but fundraising failed to meet that goal. So, members volunteered to slowly take steps to improve the lot. First, they put in the culvert.

In June 1966, building began, and by September it was complete for a mere $37, 000, $35,000 of which was borrowed. They were still paying it back when we arrived in 1987 at $300 a month. Two women carried the heavy responsibility of the construction, May Rae whom I knew and Jeryl DuPont. They held the dedication service on Nov. 4, 1966 at 5 PM. Membership exploded for both adults and children to 100, approximately the number we have now.

Fawnhaven, predecessor of Rose Blossom, a children's preschool, moved in led by Marian Shultz, whom I also remember, to meet the needs of Fellowship members and provide rental income.

I will leave you to read Edgerton about the Fellowship development years, but I will say, it remained lay led until the '80's, but there was constant discussion about obtaining professional leadership. In 1983 a minister named Robert Senghas was called for a year, and in November 1984, the first settled minister, Reverand David MacMillan, who spoke here by Zoom March 22, arrived, and the era of professional ministry began.