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“The Many Ministries of Lydia Ann Moulton Jenkins (1824-74):
Woman’s Rights Reformer, First Ordained Universalist Woman, and Doctor of Water Cure”

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Introduction

Universalist Lydia Ann Jenkins has been largely ignored in the historical record to date, for many of the same reasons so many other women have gone unrepresented or underrepresented in history. My biography-in-progress will bring to light Lydia’s contributions to mid-nineteenth-century Universalism, the Women’s Rights movement, other social reform agendas, and alternative medical approaches such as water cure and phrenology. Working in tandem with her Universalist minister husband, Edmund Jenkins, Lydia’s ministry represents several important ‘firsts:’

- 1) She and Edmund together conducted one of the earliest co-ministries in our history.
- 2) Their advocacy in both social reform and alternative medicine paralleled and grounded their service to parish ministry, making them in effect some of our earliest ordained community ministers.
- 3) Perhaps most significantly, Lydia’s ordination preceded by three years the ordination of Olympia Brown, whom modern Unitarian Universalists claim --- with some self-centered pride for how ‘we’ ordained her --- as the first American woman ordained with national authority.

Unlike Olympia, Lydia did not attend seminary: her preparation for ministry occurred in the real-world of women’s rights advocacy. Thus, Olympia does retain the distinction of being the first woman minister to receive seminary credentialing. Another contrast between the two women is that Lydia’s acceptance as a preacher was probably enhanced by the fact that her husband was already in ministerial fellowship, as were many other women after Lydia who entered Universalist ministry. Still, it is time to set the record straight and present Lydia Ann Moulton Jenkins, not Olympia Brown, as Universalism’s first ordained woman.

Lydia’s life and ministry highlight several issues that beg for new understandings of the facts of Universalist history as well as basic approaches to historical research. While I could devote this entire Collegium paper to any one of these methodological issues in some analytical detail, instead for this initial public reporting of my research, after a biographical survey that I offer here in print some detail but will only summarize in my presentation, I will discuss four issues that explain more about Lydia’s life and that suggest new approaches to our historical methods. Most important among these calls for new approaches is that of re-framing why it was Universalism (and shortly thereafter Unitarianism) in which women first acquired ministerial ordination and full-fledged functioning as ministers.

Biographical Survey

In this Collegium presentation, my sweeping look at Lydia Jenkins’ life is assisted by several handouts:

- 1) a timeline of her life divided in to four periods and a family tree listing her closest relatives;
- 2) maps of the areas of New York state where she lived most of her life, since knowing the geography helps re-create her life story; and
- 3) a list of some primary and secondary sources used to reconstruct her life and the context of social reform in up-state New York in the mid-nineteenth-century.

Published reports about her ministry and other reform work abound in both religious and secular newspapers and convention reports, but to date I have found only one document in Lydia's own hand --- a letter to leaders of Theodore Parker's church¹ --- and one statement about her personal life --- a two-part autobiographical essay published in the *Christian Ambassador* in 1868.² Unfortunately, to date I have found no images of Lydia. Though I believe I know her fairly well as a reformer, minister, and scientist, at this point I know less about what her life was like from day to day: her more personal side. Fortunately, census records from 1830 to the present make it possible to construct a skeleton of the Moulton, Jenkins, and Kinley (her daughter's married name) families. Additionally, with the help of Karen Dau, archivist of the New York Universalist Convention, I located Lydia's gravesite in Auburn, New York.

Also, contemporary published documentation about Women's Rights and temperance events of the 1850s, as well as abundant modern research and critique of these conventions and reformers, provides both specific and contextual information about the Reform phase of Lydia's life. The same cannot be said of Universalism in New York State from the 1840s through the 1870s: the *Christian Ambassador* does provide reliable weekly journal coverage from 1851 to 1868, and the *Universalist Register* offers important denominational statistics, but to date there is no substantive modern historical work on Universalism in this important geographical area. I am grateful to the research assistance Rosemary Mcafee of Salt Lake City, who is a genius at searching databases for obscure information about forgotten Americans. I also appreciate ongoing conversation with my Collegium colleague Pete Guest.

I: Formative Years: 1824-1848

The date of Lydia Ann Moulton's birth is not recorded, but from comments in an obituary of 1874, most likely she was born in 1824, in Butler, Wayne County, NY.³ Her birth family can be fairly described as gentleman farmers, as was the Jenkins family she eventually married into. Her father, William Brayton Moulton, Jr., (1795-1875) was also a printer or perhaps a journalist.⁴ Lydia's grandfather, Capt. William Moulton (1754-1831), was something of a Revolutionary War hero, famous for adventures on the high seas at the turn of the century.⁵ Curiously, one obituary for Capt. Moulton reports that just before his death, he converted to Universalist beliefs and helped start the Universalist Society in Utica.⁶ Little is known of the family of Lydia's mother, Elizabeth Brooks (1798-1867).

Lydia was the second of eight children (three boys, five girls) born to William and Elizabeth. The 1840 census locates the Moulton family in Butler. By 1850 the family resided in the town of Mentz, Cayuga County, but Lydia, by then married, no longer lived in the Moulton household.⁷

¹ Letter from Lydia Jenkins to Theodore Parker's congregation, April 28, 1858.

² Lydia Jenkins, "From Mrs. Jenkins," *Christian Ambassador* (August 22, October 3, 1868).

³ Her gravestone indicates that she died May 8, 1874, 'in her 50th year.' This would make her birthdate no earlier than May 9, 1824 and not later than May 7, 1825. The 1830 census locates the Moulton family in Butler.

⁴ "An Old Printer," *Auburn Bulletin* (June 14, 1870).

⁵ Morrison, *History of Wayne County*, 78; Neil F. Byl, "William Moulton's Endless Revolution: Deep-Sea Mutiny and Frontier Politics in the Early American Republic," *Pennsylvania History* (vol. 69, #3, 393-428).

⁶ "Deaths," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, Utica, New York (July 23, 1831).

⁷ The 1850 census, dated September 3, indicates that Lydia and Edmund lived in Waterloo.

Comments by Elizabeth in her last will and testament suggest that Lydia's relationship with her mother was less than loving and supportive. Lydia's two younger 'spinster' sisters, Mary (d. 1889) and Cordelia (d. 1905), made the local press frequently in the years after Lydia's death: in 1883 for allegedly shooting a man; in 1893 for running a 'house of ill-repute;' in 1896 for serving liquor without a license; and in 1901 for fleeing to Michigan to avoid testifying in the murder trial of Cordelia's boyfriend. In the eyes of the Moulton family, their 'renegade' activities apparently paralleled Lydia's radical life in reform and ministry, for all three sisters were buried in a plot separate from the principle Moulton site in Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, New York.

Several sources cite Lydia's upbringing in Calvinist faith. A surviving record indicates that she joined the Baptist church in Clyde in 1843, when she was nineteen.⁸ Whether this was her family's congregation is not clear. She also seemed rebellious to orthodox faith almost as early as she could question its tenants but it is not clear how and when she began the transition to liberal faith. It is not also clear which came first: her relationship with Edmund and his Universalist family, or her move toward liberal religion that somehow prompted her initial association with Edmund. There is no information about when or how she met Edmund, but a land record in Wayne County referring to 'Edmund Jenkins' and 'Lydia Jenkins' indicates that they were married by March 1846, when Lydia was twenty-two years old.

Virtually every first-hand report about Lydia refers to her keen mind and confident public-speaking presence.⁹ However, we have little concrete information about her education. She may have been partially self-taught. We do know that between May 1846 and May 1847 she and three of her sisters were students in various programs of study at the Lyons Union School, a new union school of high repute in the town of Lyons, New York.¹⁰ By then, she was 'Lydia A. M. Jenkins.' Edmund was responsible for paying her tuition and their address is listed as 'Lyons.'

Whether at the Lyons School or elsewhere, it seems clear that Lydia pursued courses of study in scientific subjects, including physiology and phrenology. In her 1868 autobiography, she says that she 'lectured' in these subjects. By lecturing she may have meant teaching school, since it seems that one of her courses of study at the Lyons School was teacher certification. Additionally, perhaps influenced by current Transcendentalist thinking and publications, Lydia also had deep connections with nature, which perhaps was her primary teacher about life and religion.¹¹ She became increasingly unsettled over not being able to reconcile discrepancies between laws of nature and orthodox religious doctrine, and how each supported her call to reform work. She credits the influence of her Universalist husband with supporting her decision to enter ministry.

⁸ Extracts from the Records of the Baptist Church of Clyde: Wayne County, New York, Historical Society.

⁹ E.R. Hanson, *Our Woman Workers* (1882), p. 426: "She was a woman of intellect and taste and of extensive scientific and literary culture."

¹⁰ *Annual Catalogue of the Lyons Union School for the year commencing May 4, 1846 and ending May 4, 1847* (Lyons, New York, 1847).

¹¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson's *Nature*, an influential Transcendentalist call to finding the divine in the natural world, appeared in 1836.

Birthright Universalist Edmund Jenkins (1817-1909) was seven years her senior.¹² He was born in Glens Falls, Queensbury Township, Warren County, NY as the second youngest child of Jedediah Jenkins, Jr. and Mary Polly Freeman. There is no record of Edmund's education, but the *Christian Ambassador's* report about his debut as a preacher describes him as 'intelligent and well-educated.'¹³ One of his sisters, Caroline Jenkins Bowen (b. 1819), attended Auburn Seminary, an academy apparently similar to the Lyons Union School in quality and content of curriculum.¹⁴

The Jenkins family included other Universalist ministers. A cousin to Edmund, Samuel Jenkins (1814 - 1873), was also a Universalist minister in several NY pulpits. Like Edmund, Samuel became a doctor on leaving ministry. A nephew, J. J. Brayton (1829 -) served several Universalist congregations in the northeast before his retirement to Clifton Springs, where he officiated the funeral of Edmund's older Brother Myron in 1895. The Jenkins family also identified at times as 'Universalist Quaker:' it seems that it was through Myron's influence that Edmund and Lydia participated in Quaker Meeting activities for a few years in the 1850s.

II: Reform Years: 1848-1856

Edmund and Lydia must have made a good couple. Being reform-minded, together they engaged in a variety of community and civic causes in this central New York region known as the 'Burned Over District.'¹⁵ They were what I call 'multiple reformers,' as were so many others of radical social and religious spirit in this region.¹⁶ In one of her essays in the 'feminist' journal *The Lily*, Lydia also identified herself as an 'ultraist:' that is, a promoter of the most radical style of benevolence.¹⁷

I have found no specific documentation to date, but it appears that Edmund's income in this period came from farming. Lydia seems to have generated a fair amount of income from lecturing on the Women's Rights circuit, and possibly from some work in alternative medicine such as phrenology. We might also note that during this reform period, when Lydia was ages twenty-four to thirty-two, a prime child-bearing time, the couple had no children.

We know most about the reform agendas Lydia advocated in this period from her essays in the *Lily*.¹⁸ Grounded in her education and interest in science and women's health, she spoke against tobacco and

¹² Obituary, Edmund Jenkins, *Universalist Register*, 1910.

¹³ *Christian Ambassador* (Sept. 17, 1853).

¹⁴ "Mortuary: Bowen," *Clyde Times* (Oct. 10, 1901).

¹⁵ Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York 1800-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), while representing older research, offers the best single-source coverage of the Burned Over District.

¹⁶ Many scholars use this concept of 'multiple reformers.' See, for example, Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Cornell University Press, 1984). For an overview of Lydia's reform interest, see the 'Sources' handout in this presentation, where I included the titles of her fifteen articles published in *The Lily*, which suggest the range of her reform work before ministry.

¹⁷ Lydia Jenkins, 'Ultraism,' *The Lily* (Nov. 1, 1849); Hewitt, *Women's Activism*.

¹⁸ See the 'Sources' handout in this presentation for titles.

alcohol. She advocated for comfortable women's dress (she wore the Bloomer dress on at least one occasion of public speaking). She spoke for healthy parenting and nurturing of children (I infer that her childhood home was not a happy one). Within her overall advocacy for Women's Rights, she was a staunch promoter of women's education: her first essay in *Christian Ambassador* was on college education for women.¹⁹ She quickly became a central player in the women's temperance movement in New York state and nationally. Many historians consider the temperance movement in the 1830s and 1840s as the stepping stone to advocacy methods that stood them well as they transformed their work into agitation for Women's Rights. Lydia also was a leading figure in the early phase of the Women's Rights movement. What she learned about networking and advocacy from her reform collaborators --- women and men --- stood her well in the next phase of her life as she dared to break gender barriers in Universalist ministry.

It was from her work in Women's Rights that Lydia achieved greatest national prominence. There is no documentation that she was there at the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls in July 1848. However, that she lived in Waterloo, only three miles away, it is hard to imagine that she did not attend.²⁰ Soon thereafter she became active on committees, advocacy groups, and speaking engagements with other prominent women reformers, including Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Antoinette Brown, Ernestine Rose, and others.²¹ She also drew the attention and collaboration of prominent male reformers such as Samuel May, Theodore Parker, Horace Greeley, and William Lloyd Garrison, many of them Unitarians and Universalists. Lydia's most immediate model for the compatibility of religion and reform work was Antoinette Brown, ordained to ministry by a Congregational Church in South Butler in 1853. While in the early phase of Women's Rights activities, in the early 1850s, Brown was recognized for her ministerial presence, gradually the women's movement separated itself from religion. This separation of church and reform work occurred in part through the pressure and prominence of Cady Stanton, who through the 1850s was becoming an ardent humanist. Lydia and Antoinette knew one another, but there is no evidence that Antoinette influenced Lydia's decision to pursue ministry.

To date I have documented Lydia's attendance at seven state or national Women's Rights conferences between 1852 and 1855. To illustrate her involvement: at the National Women's Right Convention in Cleveland in October 1853, she delivered a lengthy address to the convention that called for women's equal access in education, employment, and teaching.²² As far as I can tell, Lydia was not involved specifically in the suffrage wing of women's rights, which did not really take a firm hold until after the Civil War, by which point Lydia had moved on to water cure medicine. In that same period of the early 1850s, I have found that she was present at five state or national temperance meetings. In keeping with her science orientation, Lydia also apparently participated in networks of vegetarians, phrenologists, and proponents of alternative medicine such as water-cure but I have not yet documented her active leadership in this area of reform work during this second period of her life.

¹⁹ Lydia Jenkins, "Female Education in Colleges," *Christian Ambassador* (Aug. 22, 1857).

²⁰ While only one hundred signed the Declaration of Women's Rights, estimates are that about three hundred attended this first convention.

²¹ Sylvia D. Hoffert. *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America*. Bloomington (Indiana University Press, 1995), 15, includes Lydia in the group of twenty-three men and women who Hoffert labels as the 'vanguard' of the early phase of Women's Rights..

²² *Proceedings of the National Woman's Rights Convention held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, October 5th, 6th, and 7th, 1853*, 10 – 19.

From 1850 to 1854, Lydia and Edmund also participated in the Congregational Friends of Waterloo, which began in 1848 as a splinter group from the Genesee Yearly Meeting of Quakers. Typical of Quakers, this Friends group addressed many areas of advocacy. For the Jenkins, their involvement in the organization was primarily with anti-slavery advocacy.²³

Edmund began his career as a Universalist preacher in fall 1853. He was one of fourteen new preachers in New York that year responding to the denomination-wide call for more Universalist ministers. He was in fellowship by 1854, presumably through the Ontario Association (records are lost), and was also awarded a letter of fellowship in 1856 by the Cayuga Association.

Period Three: Active Ministry: 1857 – 1862

Lydia's period of active ministry could be the subject of an entire Collegium paper and then some. In her 1868 autobiographical essay in the *Christian Ambassador*, she reported that during her five years of ministry, she offered 638 'discourses' (130 a year on average). I have documented over 110 of her preaching engagements in Universalist churches. In that same period, I have found about twenty notices of Edmund's preaching. Some of Lydia's other 'discourses' may have been preaching in churches of other denominations. Other presentations on her list of 'discourses' may have been lectures on scientific and social reform subjects. She reported in 1868 that she 'had never known leisure or recreation: public labors, domestic cares, and study had occupied all my time.'²⁴ While both she and Edmund spent much time during these five years on the road as circuit preachers, their home base remained Wayne County.

Lydia's call to ministry came in the fall of 1856 while she was on the Women's Rights lecture circuit, possibly in the Midwest. By March 1857, having fulfilled her obligations to reform lectures she had scheduled, she offered her first supply preaching in the church of Brother Bailey in Fulton, New York.²⁵ From then on, she preached and was active in various association and state Universalist meetings, which not only educated her about Universalist ministry but also promoted her availability for supply preaching throughout the state. Word of her ministry spread quickly and she attracted regular notice in both religious and secular press. (To illustrate, to date I have found well over 75 articles about her ministry in religious press, primarily *Christian Ambassador*, between 1857 and 1872, and about twenty articles by her in those same years in those journals.)

In June 1858, after a year of supply preaching, Lydia received ministerial fellowship from the Ontario Association of Universalists at their annual meeting held that year in Freeport, Monroe County. This act of welcoming a woman into ministry received much notice in both Universalist and secular newspapers. This media attention also serves to illustrate how newspapers in that period borrowed stories from one another and also spread misinformation from one to the other (see below in this paper, for a discussion of how the media disseminated confusing reports about ministerial credentialing).

²³ *Proceedings of the Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends*. Auburn, 1849-1861. Other prominent reformers attended these meetings, such as Susan B. Anthony (1857, 1861), Caroline Dall (1861), Frederick Douglass (1850, 1860s), Samuel May (1858-1869), Theodore Parker (1857-1858), Lucy Stone (1868), and more.

²⁴ "From Mrs. Jenkins," *Christian Ambassador* (Oct. 3, 1868).

²⁵ This preacher was the father of Emma Bailey, well-known Universalist minister throughout New York and Pennsylvania in the generation after Lydia. See Emma's autobiography, *Happy Days, or the Confessions of a Woman Minister* (1901), 52.

That she was fellowshipped certainly enhanced Lydia's opportunities for ministry.²⁶ During the 1858-59 church year, she and Edmund were officially recognized as itinerant preachers for the New York State Universalists. As such, they were engaged in a regular schedule of supply preaching that included appearances in Thomas Sawyer's pulpit at the Orchard St Church (May 1858); with Edmund, many appearances in Bernard Peters' pulpit in Williamsburgh (now Brooklyn) in fall 1858 and winter 1859; at the state Universalist Convention, September 5-7, 1858 in Branchport, Yates County; and later than month at the national General Convention in Providence.²⁷ It is not clear why she passed up two important invitations in spring 1859: to speak at the commencement ceremony of Lombard University in June, and to fill Theodore Parker's pulpit at the Boston Music Hall in April during his convalescence in Europe. In these years the Jenkins were constantly on the move. In her 1868 autobiography, Lydia expressed frustration over what a hard life itinerant ministry had been: always different beds and diets (a challenge for a vegetarian), as well as the obligation she felt to visit and entertain her hosts --- not much different from circuit preaching today.

Living in Clinton by June 1860, they attended the meeting of the Central Association. Then a few weeks later they returned to the annual meeting of the Ontario Association, meeting in Geneva on June 13, 1860. The minutes of that meeting indicate that sometime earlier --- perhaps by January or February --- that Association had administered the 'rite' of ordination to them. That ordination most likely made it possible for them to gain greater geographic stability. They held a 'brief settlement' (1860-1861) at the Universalist church in Clinton, New York, home of the Clinton Liberal Institute.²⁸ They apparently also had professional connections with the Institute, possibly in teaching capacities.²⁹ In addition to the Ontario Association, their denominational ties were strong: they attended the annual meeting of the Central Association at Lee Center, Oneida County, in early June.

Lydia also served the Universalist church in Farmersville following the departure of Rev. Boughton in 1861, while also maintaining her residence and possible some responsibilities in Clinton.³⁰ On the other hand, she may not have started the Farmersville ministry until fall 1861, since she apparently spent the

²⁶ She probably recognized the importance of institutional credentialing. However, she also reported that she would have preached regardless: her call to the pulpit was not conditioned on acceptance by a religious institution such as the Universalist church. See "A Woman in Fellowship," *Gospel Banner* (July 11, 1858).

²⁷ Archival records from the Williamsburgh church provide useful information about frequency of the Jenkins' preaching as well as how much they were paid as supply preachers.

²⁸ "The Universalist Church," *The Courier* (1958: Nov. 6).

²⁹ ESJ, "Rev. Dr. Chapin in Clinton," *Christian Ambassador* (June 16, 1858). ESJ, LAJ, "To The Friends of Clinton," *Christian Ambassador* (November 3, 1860). The Clinton Universalist Church was built in 1821, and the congregation became Universalist in 1831. It measured 52 by 40 feet. See Amos Delos Gridly, *History of the Town of Kirkland, New York*.

³⁰ The Farmersville congregation was founded in 1850. Rev. Boughton was minister until 1861, coincidentally the same year Thomas Sawyer returned to Clinton to serve the church there.

summer months in eastern Massachusetts.³¹ In her autobiography, she admitted that by fall of 1862 she was worn out from this lifestyle and needed a break from ministry. I do not agree with an often-repeated comment about Lydia's health, possibly initiated by E. R. Hanson in 1881, that Lydia was disabled by lifelong spinal injury. For a person as active as Lydia was, it is hard to imagine that she suffered the impairment Hanson describes. Even a totally healthy person would express fatigue from the lifestyle she lived.

Lydia's quick rise to notice as a minister was not only because of her gender: from all descriptions and reports --- and there were many --- she was also an effective, moving preacher.³² Most Universalists willingly accepted a woman in the pulpit: some accepted this woman, but not all women. As we will see below in more detail, a few such as Rev. Thomas Whittemore offered outright resistance.

Period Four: Water Cure and More

From 1862 on, as Lydia withdrew her services as preacher and minister, and as the notion of women in the pulpit became more normalized,, Olympia Brown entered the ministerial scene. Olympia gained recognition and attention among Universalists when she enrolled at the Canton School of St. Lawrence University in fall 1861. She was ordained to Universalist ministry in June 1863, granting her the distinction of being the first woman to receive a seminary degree as credentialing for ministry. However, her ordination did not mark a first: Olympia was ordained in 1863 by the same procedure of Association endorsement that Lydia enjoyed in 1860. Olympia's ordination was by the St. Lawrence Association, as Lydia's was by the Ontario Association three years earlier.³³

For the 1863-64 church year --- that is, one year after her physical depletion --- the Jenkins announced that they would be 'traveling in New York.' They may have preached during this year, but they also attended school to become doctors of water-cure medicine. It is fairly clear that the school they attended was Dr. R. T. Trall's New York Hygeio-Therapeutic College in New York City. Trall also published the *Water-Cure Journal*, to which Lydia made frequent contributions. Lydia's graduation project in May 1864 was on 'The Nervous System;' Edmund's was on 'Secretion and Excretion.' Briefly, the popular alternative therapy of water-cure was quite popular in mid-century: it involved various internal and external applications of waters. (See illustrations included in the Collegium presentation of this paper.) Doctors of water cure opened sanitariums throughout the country, New York State having among the largest number. It appears that some of these establishments functioned as much as get-away places for the wealthy as medicinal cures for the ailing. Areas with natural springs, such as Saratoga Springs, New York were likely locations of water cure institutions.

During the 1864-65 year, the Jenkins lived in Hammonton, New Jersey, midway between Philadelphia and the 'shore,' as they say in Jersey.³⁴ I have not yet indentified why they were there or how they

³¹ *Christian Ambassador* (June 21, 1861). She was not present at the meeting of the Central Association on June 5 in Rome. Curiously both Jenkins participated in a Universalist meeting in Medford, MA, in November. See *Christian Ambassador* (Nov. 9, 1861).

³² It seems she preached from manuscript.

³³ Minutes of the Ontario Association, *Christian Ambassador* (June 1863). Olympia also enjoyed a front-page publication of a sermon, 'God's Judgment,' in the April 11th edition of the periodical.

³⁴ Hammonton became its own town in 1861. Before that, it was included in the town of Mullica.

supported themselves financially, but it appears that they did not function as Universalist ministers. Universalists found new life in Hammonton around 1860 under Rev Asher Moore, who led that congregation until 1862, when he moved to Hartford and Hammonton apparently was without a minister. The Jenkins may have seen a missionary opportunity in moving to Hammonton, but the 1866 *Universalist Register*, reporting for 1865, lists no ministers with Hammonton. There was an attempt to organize a Universalist Social Circle in Hammonton in 1864 to equip a Sunday School. It seems that Hammonton did not have another minister until Moore returned in 1869. Eventually Universalists in Hammonton erected a building and Rev. Moses Ballou preached there started in 1874.³⁵ The Jenkins may have found this part of the state appealing because of plans for a Utopian community, and also for the presence of two Spiritualist communities. However they moved away in spring or summer 1865 because of the hard winter weather they had experienced.³⁶

Although the state of New York reported census figures mid-way through the national reporting every decade, I have not found New York census records for 1865. Thus, I have not yet identified where the Jenkins lived when they returned to up-state New York. Quite possibly they returned to Jenkins family property in Wayne County: the *Universalist Register* of 1866, which reported data up to June 1865, does not include any listing for the Jenkins. By the *Register* of 1867, reflecting information for 1866, their home is listed as Binghamton, although in that same *Register*, Lydia is also named as minister of the Universalist church in Cortland, New York. I have found no other information about the Cortland appointment. For every year of the *Register* through Lydia's death in 1874, the Jenkins' residence is Binghamton, but without ministerial charge.

Their move to Binghamton in May, 1866 represented the most permanence of their marriage. On the grounds of their home in the fifth ward, they opened a small water cure establishment, which also took in a few boarders. This relocation to Binghamton to practice watercure was a wise one. The much larger Binghamton Water-Cure, opened by Dr. O.V. and Mrs. H.H. Thayer in 1849, made this city a mecca for water-cure treatments. While the Jenkins continued to participate in Universalist State Convention and Association meetings, in an article in the *Christian Ambassador* reporting a fire in Binghamton's Universalist Church Lydia clarifies that ministry was not their primary reason to locate in that city.³⁷

One may wonder what the Jenkins' relationship with fellow Universalists was like from the time they entered medical studies. For the State Universalist Convention in September 1865, it appears that Lydia was miffed with fellow Universalists because convention officials lost her application for financial relief. Lydia also seemed quite disillusioned that Binghamton liberals found it so challenging to create unity of cause and concerted efforts at outreach. Her writings on Universalist topics in this final period were much more reflective and speculative, rather than action or advocacy oriented. She addressed topics such as 'Rewards and Punishments,' 'The Perfectability of Human Character,' and 'God, A Consuming Fire.'³⁸ She also published a number of pieces for the health community: my favorite is 'How to Cook Potatoes,' published in *Heralds of Health* in 1869.

³⁵ H. W. Wilbur, *Illustrated History of the Town of Hammonton*. Thanks to Pete Guest for finding this source for me.

³⁶ "Southeastern New Jersey," *Water-cure Journal* (vol. 39-40), 139. She wrote: "We have now had one inter's experience in Lower Jersey. The winds are almost constantly fierce and strong; swaying back and forth between the coast and bay, with no hills to break their force; they are tedious and disagreeable in the extreme."

³⁷ Lydia Jenkins, "From Binghamton," *Christian Amnassador* (May 2, 1868).

³⁸ *Christian Ambassador* (September 22, 1866); *Ladies Repository* (1872), *Christian Ambassador* (Aug. 3, 1872).

Lydia herself reported that when she moved to Binghamton in May 1866 her health was quite deteriorated. However, by September 1868, *The Ladies Repository* reported that her health was much improved and various notices in newspapers advertized her availability for lectures and teaching of Universalism and medicine. Her mother's death in 1867 may account for Lydia's restoration of health. In turn, her restoration of health may account for one of the most surprising finds in my research.

The 1870 census, dated August 25, indicates that Edmund and Lydia's household included an eight-month old daughter, Grace, born in December 1869, when Lydia was approximately forty-five. Some reports about water cure suggest that the treatment could increase fertility, so Lydia may have been the beneficiary of her own curative measures. Between 1897 and 1909, Grace in turn had five children. To date I have located only one surviving descendant of Lydia, a grandchild of one of Grace's children, living in Australia. This descendant has no information about his important ancestor. Grace died sometime before 1930.

There is relatively little information about the final four years of Lydia's life, perhaps because as a new mother, she was less publically engaged and thus less frequently the subject of published reports. On and off, she and Edmund continued their connections with Universalist association and state meetings. Their main professional focus, however, appeared to be the water-cure facility.³⁹

Sadly, Lydia met an untimely end. In early March, 1874, their home and medical establishment sustained a terrible fire.⁴⁰ She died on May 7, in her forty-ninth year, of complications from the fire which 'gave a terrible shock to her nervous system.'⁴¹ Presumably many of her personal papers were lost in this fire, for they could only 'save a little clothing and furniture.' Her funeral service was held in the Universalist Church in Auburn on May 9. The sermon was by Universalist Rev. W. E. Manley of Auburn, assisting the pastor of the Auburn church, J.W. Keyes. Lydia was buried in Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn. Her father died one year later, March 2, 1875 and was buried next to his wife in the same cemetery but in a different plot from Lydia. While the *Christian Leader*, the principle Universalist periodical of 1874, recognized her death, the *Universalist Register* did not include an obituary. However, the Minutes of the Universalist General Convention of 1874 note her death. In contrast, Edmund's death twenty-five years later was recognized by the *Register*, even though he had left not only preaching but also Universalism, for the Unitarian faith.

Coda: Post Lydia Ann Jenkins

Edmund raised Grace alone until his marriage sometime before 1880 to Emma Kinne (b. 1842). The 1880 census lists their residence as Binghamton. Their daughter, Maude, was born in November, 1883. The *Universalist Register* reports that the Jenkins moved to Breesport, a village outside Elmira, New York, sometime around 1886. Elmira was located in another area of natural springs, and Edmund opened a water-cure establishment there. Apparently he did not function at all as a Universalist minister. In fact, by the time of his death in 1909, he was not even identified as a Universalist.

³⁹ See for example, "Hygienic," *Heralds of Health* (vol. 17-18, 1871), 144. "Dr. Jenkins' Institution, Binghamton, is now open for patients and a few boarders. The best facilities are afforded for the treatment of all forms of Chronic Disease. Special Treatment given to women by Mrs. Jenkins."

⁴⁰ Reported in *Binghamton Democrat*, March 7, 1874.

⁴¹ W.E.M. "Obituary," *Christian Leader* (May 30, 1874).

On April 24, 1895 Grace married George Kinley, formerly of Breesport. Rev. Thomas K. Beecher of Park Church, Elmira, performed the ceremony in the bride's home. Edmund died on April 10, 1909, age 91. Dr. Samuel Eastman of Park Church officiated the funeral. Edmund was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Elmira. The *Universalist Register* notes that while he served Universalist ministry for fifty years, in his later years he had gone over to Unitarianism because of the broader views of that faith. His wife Emma died in 1911 and was buried in the same cemetery. Maude Emi Jenkins died in 1977 at the age of 94.

Historical Issues

My study of Lydia Jenkins' life and ministry brings to light several issues in our approaches to creating Universalist history that warrant examination: --- 1) the claiming of Olympia Brown as first ordained woman, while we have virtually forgotten Lydia; 2) the less-than-clear categories of ministerial credentialing in mid-nineteenth-century, 3) our insufficient acknowledgment of the 'secular' Women's Rights movement as an important preparation for her ministry; and most important, 4) my view of mid-nineteenth-century Universalists as 'passive radicals' rather than boundary-breaking reformers. Let me explain each issue.

1: Ordination

Lydia was ordained to Universalist ministry by June, 1860, at the age of thirty-six. This was three years before the 28-year-old Olympia Brown's ordination of June, 1863, an event recorded in many Unitarian Universalist histories as well as histories of the Women's Rights movement. Both ordinations were of equivalent authority, occurring at annual meetings of Universalist associations: Lydia's occurred at the Ontario Association and Olympia's took place at the St. Lawrence Association. According to Universalist polity, each ordination carried with it the quality of 'national authority,' a phrase used by many modern historians to describe Olympia's status without clear understanding that this phrase means that she was accorded national recognition throughout the denomination as an ordained minister, made possible because Universalist polity was not 'top-down' but 'bottom-up.' That is, decisions at local and regional levels were honored at higher organizational levels.

Additionally, the scope of Lydia's and Olympia's ordinations were similar: each was essentially a vote before the fellowship committee of three or four ministers of their respective ordaining Associations. Lydia's differed only in that she was ordained with her husband. The rituals differed somewhat in that it appears that the Jenkins did not enjoy any type of celebration of ordination following the vote. In contrast, there was a worship service of ordination for Olympia the day following her vote, while the Association was still in session.

So why have we missed Lydia as first ordained women? Compared with the historical notice we give today to Olympia's ordination, at the time of neither ordination was there anything close to comparable publicity in Universalist media, nor in the minutes of these meetings, that women had arrived at this new stage of ministerial credentialing. Could this mean that by 1860, and especially by 1863, the ordination of a woman was not particularly news-breaking among the Universalists?⁴² In contrast, as we have seen, what did attract great media attention in both secular and sacred newspapers was Lydia's fellowshipping in 1858. Lydia became known in the modern historical record for this fellowshipping, but in part because her ordination was so much less recognized by her contemporary media, the modern history of women in Universalist ministry missed her important contribution as first ordained.

⁴² Following ordination, the Jenkins prepared for a ministry in Clinton; Olympia graduated from seminary and then served briefly as minister in Marshfield, Vermont, before taking a year off to help her family back in Ohio.

It could also be suggested that modern Unitarian Universalists know Olympia better than Lydia because Olympia served parishes longer: from 1864 to 1878, when she completed her third settlement in Racine, Wisconsin. In contrast, Lydia effectively left parish ministry after only five years of service (she was worn out). However, both women continued their ministry through other venues: in effect as community ministers. As we have seen, Lydia continued reform work and was also a doctor of water-cure medicine. Olympia assumed leadership in the Wisconsin State Women's Rights Association. Finally, Lydia died much younger --- at age fifty --- while Olympia had over forty more years of ministry to make a name for herself.

In the long run, however, it wasn't their ministerial service but primarily the way in which the historical record of their lives was preserved, that accounts for the elevation of Olympia and the absence of Lydia. With the help of her daughter, Olympia wrote her autobiography near the end of her life in the early 1920s. In a parallel way, Lydia published autobiographical essays published in *Christian Ambassador* in 1868.⁴³ However, neither account was enough to keep either woman in historical awareness after each of them died. However, Olympia had a historical advantage: she became known to history because in 1963, the centennial of her ordination, the Unitarian Universalist Historical Society published this autobiography. A century after her ordination, Olympia entered historical notice. Unitarian Universalists of the 1960s' second-wave feminism period indeed welcomed her because they had a woman 'hero' to claim as their own. In celebrating Olympia, Unitarian Universalists also came to celebrate themselves for their supposedly open and inviting role in helping women enter ministry. In contrast, Lydia's centennial in 1960 went unnoticed: no one assembled her life story in any depth, not in 1960 and not since then until my research, perhaps because she seemed to be less worthy of historical note because she supposedly was not ordained.⁴⁴

One might suggest that once the fledging Unitarian Universalist Association found a woman 'hero' to celebrate, we stopped looking for other early women in ministry. Who today knows the names of some of the other nearly two hundred Unitarian and Universalist women ordained to ministry by 1920? And even regarding Olympia, who today can say much more about her than that she was the first woman minister? For both Olympia and Lydia, their historical importance was not a single act of ordination but how they dedicated their entire lives in service to ministering the liberal spirit in its widest dimensions. Our modern histories need to reclaim the total ministries of both women.

One final note: Olympia and Lydia must have known one another. They attended some of the same Women's Rights and Universalist meetings and they moved in similar reform circles. Given that connection, it is striking that, as far as I can tell, Olympia never acknowledged Lydia's pioneering in ministry and she did not demonstrate appreciation for how Lydia's ministry made her own path much easier. In contrast, Olympia does credit Antoinette Brown, still alive and ordained as a Unitarian ministry at the writing of the autobiography, with mentoring her ministry development.⁴⁵

⁴³ She announced three such essays but to date I have found only the first two.

⁴⁴ The most substantive report on Lydia Jenkins was a twelve-page article published in a relatively obscure journal in 1985. See Charles Semowich, "Lydia Ann Jenkins: Women's Rights Activist, Physician, and First Recognized Woman Minister in the United States," *Yesteryears: A Quarterly for the New York State Historical and Genealogical Research* (1985, vol. 28, #2), 40-54.

⁴⁵ Letters between Olympia and Antoinette, Schlesinger Library.

2: Confusion over Credentialling

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Universalists took some measures to standardize ministerial formation. For one, they created three categories of credentialing: fellowshiping, licensing, and ordination. These were hierarchical in the sense that ordination was the final stage of the three, dependent on the previous two. ‘Fellowshipping’ meant recognition by the Universalist fold as a Universalist-identified minister. ‘Licensing’ meant a time-limited certificate for the right to preach the Universalist gospel. Lay preachers and seminary students could be licensed to preach, but they did not have privileges for other ministerial functions. ‘Ordination’ meant endorsement of an applicant’s on-going capacity to preach as well as to serve a settled pastorate with any administering of rites and rituals such as baptism, marriages, and funerals.

As we noted above, Lydia’s place in the historical record was in part influenced by contemporary and modern historians not recording the full picture of her ministerial credentialing. A related factor in how her historical profile evolved was outright confusion about Universalist credentialing habits, even among Universalist ministers. While the definitions of ministerial categories were defined by the 1830s and 1840s, apparently many did not heed or did not understand their meaning. If denomination leaders were confused, no wonder that authors of newspaper reports often got it wrong. For the media --- secular and religious newspapers alike, including Universalist journals --- what was newsworthy was that a woman had dared to enter the pulpit, not the correct reporting of the category of ministry she achieved.⁴⁶ Furthermore, how confusion about Lydia’s ministerial status spread also illustrates how papers borrowed stories from one another: an error published in one paper often was repeated in another article. Then, contemporary confusion about ministerial classification carried over into modern history-making. Finally, that many minutes of association meetings were lost added to inconsistent information about Lydia’s ministry.⁴⁷

To illustrate the nature of confusion about credentialing, in the weeks following Lydia’s fellowship, reports in both secular and religious described her variously as ‘licensed’ and ‘ordained.’ Some compared her ‘ordination’ to that of Antoinette Brown’s in 1853.⁴⁸ Most notably, the *Religious Inquirer*, a Unitarian journal, reported that Lydia had been ordained, setting off a chain of responses from various Universalist contributors. Such conversation about a reported ordination of a woman opened the door for Thomas Whittemore, editor of the influential journal, *The Trumpet*, to reveal two misunderstandings he apparently held about Universalist ordination. One, apparently he accepted reports that Lydia was ordained, even though she had not had prior fellowship. Two, because of his categorical aversion to women in the pulpit, he argued that hers was only some sort of local ‘ordination’ and thus he could discredit her status.

“We speak only for ourself and leave others to speak for themselves. It is, we believe, merely a very small part of the Universalist denomination that have ordained Mrs. J. The whole denomination would not like to be held accountable for it. We do not deny women can speak well and pray well to our certain knowledge; but has Jesus Christ sanctioned the practice of sending

⁴⁶ As already noted, the *Christian Ambassador*, the principle periodical to cover Lydia’s ministry, was quite careful about vocabulary, accurately reporting her fellowship in 1858 and her ordination in 1860.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 5: “The Responses,” in Hoffert, *When Hens Crow*, 91-115, for critique of the influence of newspapers reporting on the public’s perception of reformers and the reform movement.

⁴⁸ Few of Lydia’s contemporaries understood the difference between hers and Antoinette’s ordination: that Antoinette’s was valid only for the local congregation which ordained her.

out women as ministers of the gospel?”⁴⁹

Luckily, other Universalist clergy were better informed about credentialing practice. The prominent A. B. Grosh refuted Whittemore’s claim:

“Was not Mrs. Jenkins fellowshipped *by the denomination* precisely, and as *fully*, as the great majority of our preachers were fellowshipped and ordained by it. She was fellowship by an *Association* in full fellowship with a *State Convention*, which again, is in full fellowship with the *United States Convention*--- thus making her fellowship the *usual, legal, and full* fellowship of ‘the *denomination*.’⁵⁰

Just a few years later, by the time of Olympia’s ordination in 1863, ministerial credentialing was more regularized, but it was not until the 1870 centennial of Universalists that the denomination began to develop yet more intentional, systematic methods of credentialing ministers. This step toward standard credentialing when hand-in-hand with the denomination’s promotion of new seminaries to better prepare Universalists for the ministry. That Olympia Brown received a seminary degree, I suggest, helped make her path into ministry much easier than Lydia’s had been. In particular, Rev. Thomas Sawyer was a staunch advocate for seminary preparation. He also founded the Universalist Education Society and served in leadership at Clinton Liberal Institute and the seminary at Tufts College.

3: Influence of Women’s Rights Movement

The life and ministry of Lydia Jenkins illustrates clearly how the burgeoning women’s rights movement provided some of the groundwork for women’s entry into ministry. That up-state New York was the epicenter for women’s right advocacy, begun in the 1840s, and women’s seeking the pulpit in the 1850s, is no coincidence. The first three important names in women’s ministry --- Antoinette Brown, Lydia Jenkins, and Olympia Brown --- were also key players in the women’s movement. The influence of the women’s movement on women’s ministry is unquestionable. That Universalist historiography has missed Lydia’s important role in Women’s Rights before she entered ministry has contributed to our missing the full importance of her contribution to Universalist ministry.

Through work in women’s rights, Lydia practiced some of the same tools required for ministry. First and foremost, as a reformer she honed her skills in public speaking. While the cultural theory of separate spheres said that women should remain silent in the public arena, women enjoying the legacy of Seneca Falls knew better. They were called to exercise their public voice.⁵¹ Once she heard a call to preach, Lydia gave no second thought to the public speaking that that call required. Her style for public speaking regularly won her praise.⁵²

⁴⁹ “The Trumpet on Women’s preaching,” *Christian Ambassador* (August 28, 1858).

⁵⁰ A.B. Grosh, “Full or Partial Fellowship?” *The Trumpet* (Sept. 4, 1858).

⁵¹ Women did not preside at Seneca Fall Convention, but soon thereafter they did run meetings.

⁵² For example, see “The Woman Preacher,” *Christian Ambassador* (Oct. 30, 1858): “The woman in the pulpit read the Scriptures, hymns, and the notices, as easily and with the same self-possession as one would perform ordinary domestic work. Why not? And she prayed. Yes, a woman embodied in words the wants and aspirations of the worshippers and standing before the people, humbly and earnestly offered them to God. Her voice carried hearts with it.”

However, public speaking was not the only tool from women's networking that enhanced Lydia's ministry. As a reformer, Lydia also learned the value of the printed page and the public attention on women that the printed media provided. The women's movement regularly was the subject of articles, pro and con, in news media. Several of Lydia's speeches at national conversation were printed in full, which helped promote her notice in the public eye even before ministry. Indeed, activist women knew how to command attention of the public. Public attention on them increased all the more as they lobbied the state legislature for their causes.

Also, the art of advocacy, such as they practiced in their appeals to state legislatures, was another tool that served Lydia well as she advanced the cause of women in ministry. Women's rights reformers endured much criticism and social pushback: Lydia acquired a tough skin to hold her own against criticism that women's place was not in public speaking venues such as the pulpit. She endured on-going gender specific review of how she looked and what her voice sounded like, rather than the wisdom of her theological arguments.⁵³ This strong skin was especially useful when fellow Universalist ministers like Whittemore opposed her ministry.

From the women, she also learned that women's place is often on the road if they wish to remain engaged in the public arena: that Lydia never found parish settlements of any substantive tenure typified women's work and women's role.

She also learned to analyze and critique life through gendered eyes: that is, she learned a feminist mindset --- long before the term was applied to analytical thinking --- which she later applied to women's oriented interpretations of scripture as well as to Universalist theology.⁵⁴ Had they had a clearer view of the influence of Women's Rights on her theological discernment, modern historians might not have missed the significance of passages from Lydia such as the following suggesting her view of theology through feminist eyes:

No desire for notoriety induced me to enter a field of labor wherein my sex were almost unknown. I had no desire to make a noise in the ranks. That wish (as well as expectation) is still very far from my heart. But when a few of truly Christian generosity, gave a word of greeting and encouragement, my gratitude was deeper than tongue can toil. Not because they aided me. I had no claim for myself, but because they helped to create a liberal sentiment which has given me access to hundreds of souls waiting for one to feed them with the bread of life.

There was a time in my experience when the fundamental doctrines of the prevailing denominations came to appear too terrible to be true. And yet I supposed them all inculcated in

⁵³ "Mrs. Jenkins," *Christian Ambassador* (Oct. 30: 1858): "Mrs. Jenkins has indeed been blessed with fine endowments. Added to a person of comly exterior, she has a voice peculiarly adapted to the sacred desk --- full, rond and musical, and withal, entirely feminine. Her enunciation is faultlessly clear, and her action propriety itself -- affection having no more to do with her exterior than hypocrisy with hesr heart. Her head is a model for the phrenology sculptor, and her countenance wears a serene earnestness quite unmistakable. Her words are drops in a shower of tenderness while her sentences, frequently, are perfect torrents of sympathy --- the heart trembling in every syllable of her impassioned plea. Her morel logic is irresistible and she possessed the power (in a degree we have never known exceeded) of shaming the human soul into a higher appreciation of its duties here and its destinies hereafter."

⁵⁴ The scripture she based her sermons on is often included in reports about the preaching.

the scriptures. My own existence, the joy and beauty in the world, and the evidence of a great and good design in the creation of man, all led me to see a God perfect in every attribute---whose embodiment is Love. But to me the Bible very plainly presented another God. Had not Universalism come to my rescue, at that important period, and enabled me to see the Christian doctrine and the character of God as revealed in the Scriptures, in a very different aspect, scepticism --- that brink of rain which yawned before me --- had, I fear, engulfed me.

My message I dare not withhold. Failure in the world's estimate may be my fortune, but failure can never attend the great cause which I love more than anything else. I will try to be one of its faithful, humble laborers. The prevalent Theology of Christendom convinces me **that there is need of an infusion of the feminist element in theology** (bold mine). If failure, if martyrdom is mine, this demand will still be met. 'Want is earnest of its own supply.'⁵⁵

Perhaps most important, from her work in Women's Rights, she acquired skills in creating networks of support for one another. While very few women were actually part of the array of voices when she started to preach who offered critique of her ministry, networks of women supporting one another in the Universalist ministry did become more apparent from the 1860s on. These later women ministers honored well the legacy learned from their 'feminist' predecessors.

The women's movement may also have provided a back-handed encouragement of sorts for Lydia to seek ministry. In the early stage of the movement, especially in the earliest national women's rights conventions of the 1850s, religion occupied a standard place in these gatherings. Routinely ministers were present, in part to offer the religious and moral perspective on conversation, and often to deliver prayers. 'Rev.' Antoinette Brown played such a role even before her ordination in 1853. Increasingly through the 1850s, however, the women's movement disassociated itself from religion, so that by the 1860s, Antoinette, while continuing to attend meetings, was known for much else than being the representative of religion. Most scholars of the women's movement agree that the separation of religion from women's reform was especially the handiwork of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. That Stanton never experienced a reconciliation of religion and feminism in mid-century accounts in part for her fairly angry and unpopular response at the end of the century by publishing *The Woman's Bible*.⁵⁶

4: Desire to reform Universalism

These first three issues about Lydia's ministry that I've discussed as factors in how she has been largely lost to the historical record --- 1) the claiming of Olympia Brown as first ordained woman, 2) the less-than-clear categories of ministerial credentialing in mid-nineteenth-century, and 3) our missing her training in the 'secular' Women's Rights movement as an important preparation for ministry --- together lead to my fourth and most important observation about modern historical methods as they influence how we evaluate women ministers in our heritage. I call for a new view of women's entry into liberal ministry, not as a proud accomplishment modern Unitarian Universalists claim our ancestors made possible for women, but instead something that women did by themselves, for themselves. That is, I suggest that our liberal forefathers were not nearly as open, inviting, and supportive of social reform and boundary-breaking women as our standard histories usually report. Universalists may have been on the side of

⁵⁵ "Letter from Mrs. Jenkins," *Christian Ambassador* (Oct. 23, 1858).

⁵⁶ Kathi Kern, *Mrs. Stanton's Bible* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

reform, but I suggest that, at least as concerns women's rights, as a denomination they were 'passive radicals.'⁵⁷ I offer two points that Lydia's story offers in support of this viewpoint.

First, while we do not know exactly when Lydia converted to Universalist theology, it is clear that her call to preach was at least partially motivated by her desire to spread life-changing good news to others, as hers had been changed by finding Universalism, in part through Edmund. What also seems clear is that she converted to liberal theology before signing on to its polity: that is, its institutional procedures. For instance, on the heels of receiving Universalist fellowship she reported that even if she had not been approved, she would have preached anyway, free of institutional affiliation. She was called to preach and she knew she had the skills required of a preacher. In some ways, she simply added preaching to her reform list. Religion became another area of reform, complementing her work in science and medicine, temperance, prohibition, women's rights, and more.⁵⁸ That is, religion expanded her identity as a 'multiple reformer.' How and why she looked to Universalism as the institutional structure for her preaching was primarily, I suggest, not because Universalists welcomed women with open arms to boundary-breaking roles --- Universalist periodicals of the 1850s suggest very little intentional, institutional endorsement of the growing Women's Rights movement. Instead, Lydia chose Universalism as her institutional venue because Universalist polity represented what sociologist Mark Chavez calls 'loose coupling.'⁵⁹ That is, Universalist polity had few if any 'rules' to prevent women from entering the pulpit. Lydia's skills as an active and effective reformer in other subject areas enabled her to negotiate the challenging and often combative path into Universalist ministry. Women were able to enter ministry through the Universalist and Unitarians denomination because of their fairly loose organizational structures.

Second, I propose that part of Lydia's mindset for entering Universalist denominational activities --- as represented by participating in the credentialing process --- was at least partially motivated by her belief that this liberal faith was in need of reform. Driving by the same zeal to change the world that Lydia knew from women's rights and other reform, and as the wife of a Universalist minister and thus perhaps able to see the denomination's social conservatism from the inside, she may well have decided to apply her decade of reform experiences and skills to 'modernize' this institution whose theology she had come to love. That is, her move into ministry might be understood in part as a desire to bring the denomination up to date with current reform standards, at least as regards women's rights.

Let me offer more evidence for my view of Universalists as 'passive radicals.' Contrary to our modern self-image, all evidence from my research suggests that Universalists of the 1850s, even in women- and reform-oriented New York State, were not particularly proactive in advancing women's rights. I draw evidence largely from a reading of *Christian Ambassador*, the reporting voice of the New York State Convention. Overall my reading of this journal is that its editorship and reporting habits were fair, objective, and current with denominational activities.⁶⁰ Granted, the publication did not begin until 1851, after the women's rights movements had been underway for a few years. However, from those first years of the journal through the time Lydia entered ministry (1851-1857) there is very little in the way of

⁵⁷ As Channing has been called a 'reluctant radical' in regards to promoting abolition.

⁵⁸ In her autobiography she indicates that she did not abandon these other areas of work: she simply added preaching to her work as a reformer.

⁵⁹ Mark Chavez, *Ordaining Women* ().

⁶⁰ The first editor, J.M. Austin, lived in Auburn and appears to have known the Jenkins personally.

proactive advocacy for women: the reader would never suspect that Seneca Falls was just a few miles down the road from the editor's office in Auburn. Even after Lydia's preaching kicked off a flurry of correspondence about women in ministry, most of the contributors on the topic of women's ministry were men. As represented by *Christian Ambassador*, Universalist women apparently had not yet found their activist voices. In contrast to the proactive spirit to change the world that Lydia knew from her reformer colleagues, New York Universalists must have appeared quite docile.

Additionally, the General Convention of Universalists continued to table resolutions in support of women as leaders and ministers. Starting in 1858, Judge John Galbraith of Pennsylvania, a staunch supporter of Lydia, offered resolutions to the Convention recognizing women's equality, which the Convention regularly tabled.⁶¹

Another obvious pushback to women in ministry came from Lydia's fellow Universalist ministers. Several issued outright opposition to women in the pulpit, the most outrageous example being Rev. Thomas Whittemore. Whittemore's voice as preacher and especially as editor of the *Trumpet and Universalist Herald* carried weight in the denomination.⁶² Lydia heard her call to preach in fall 1856 and began preaching in March, 1857, invited to the pulpit of Bro. Bailey in Fulton, New York. By mid-April, Whittemore declared that he is 'not pleased that Mrs. Lydia A. Jenkins should preach the Gospel of impartial Grace.'⁶³ By August his words increased in intensity: "We feel it is our duty to say, to prevent subsequent misunderstanding, that we doubt whether the denomination will approve the act of ordaining a woman as a preacher of the gospel and pastor of a Society."⁶⁴ Granted, several other Universalist ministers (male, of course), such as A. B. Grosh, strongly countered Whittemore's caustic comments, but several others, such as Rev. Collins of Pennsylvania, offered only conditional support of women in ministry, as when he said that Lydia Jenkins, an exceptional women, could preach, but the denomination should be guarded in opening ministry to all women. We should also note that by the beginning of 1859 Whittemore did come around to accepting and even praising Lydia after actually hearing her preach. Nevertheless, the hurdles and challenges posed by a substantial number of ministers in our supposedly liberal heritage only added to the challenges Lydia's faced in accomplishing this gender-breaking ministry. In these years of Lydia's active ministry, many Universalists did little to prevent women ministers from engaging in their calling, but the denomination also did little to overtly support and encourage them.

Conclusions

Lydia Jenkins' life story deserves to be part of our commonly understood history of early women ministers. Even moreso than Olympia Brown, Lydia's life and ministry exemplify how the mindset of multiple-reform as practiced in upstate New York in the 1840s and 1850s made possible this proud accomplishment we hold today in Unitarian Universalist histories of have the first women in the pulpit. Uncovering Lydia's life story also allows us to know --- to the extent any historian may recreate a life --- a remarkable, creative, daring woman who can inspire proactive reform in the broad sweep of social justice. Uncovering Lydia's life story also illustrates how much the gospel of liberal religion meant to one

⁶¹ At least as late as 1863 the resolution were tabled. I have not checked past 1863.

⁶² More on Whittemore: DUUB, etc

⁶³ "Shall Woman Preach," *Christian Ambassador* (April 25, 1857).

⁶⁴ "Ordination of a Female," *Trumpet and Universalist Herald* (Aug. 21, 1858).

woman, who countered multiple institutional odds to remain promote a theology that had changed her life. We owe it to Lydia and other Universalist and Unitarian women activists of the mid- nineteenth-century to approach the writing of their histories with eyes and mindsets that fairly represent their contributions to our liberal religious history and heritage.

UU Collegium : Fall 2012 Meeting:
Biographical Timeline for Lydia Jenkins and Edmund Jenkins

1819: Edmund b. in Queensbury township, Warren County, NY

I: Period One: 1824-1848: formative years, educated in nature and academy in science, physiology, etc.; Calvinist (Baptist?) religious grounding; likely family tensions; marriage by March 1846

1824, probably: Lydia probably b. in Butler, Wayne County, NY

1843: joined Baptist Church of Clyde

1846: Edmund and Lydia married by March

1846-47: attends Lyons Academy

II: Period Two: 1848-1856: Reform Years: New York State and National prominence in women's rights movement: conventions, lecturing, advocacy; also, temperance leader and other reform subjects; Edmund's entry into Universalist ministry

1848: July: Seneca Falls, NY: first Women's Rights Convention

1848-56: LAJ at numerous national and state women's right, temperance, and alternative health conventions

1850-54: Jenkins attended Congregational Friends of Waterloo

1853: ESJ began to preach

1854: ESJ fellowship with Ontario Association

1856: ESJ fellowship with Cayuga Association

III: Period Three: 1857-1862: Active Preaching: New York state and neighboring areas

1857: March: LAJ first supply preaching in Fulton, NY

1858: June: LAJ fellowship with Ontario Universalist Association

Sept: LAJ preaches at NY State Conv; national General convention, where gender-equality proposal tabled

LAJ, ESJ begin year of circuit preaching throughout New York state

1860: June: LAJ and ESJ ordained by Ontario Association; also attend Central Association

1861: LAJ, ESL ministry Clinton Universalist Church, also with Clinton Liberal Institute

IV: Period Four: 1863-1874: A Ministry of Total Body: attend water cure school in New York City, live one year in south New Jersey, move back to Up-state NY one year, finally settle in Binghamton, NY 1866: daughter Grace born 1869; fatal fire in Binghamton home April 1874, death of LAJ May 1874

1863-64: LAJ, ESJ attend medical school in New York City

1864-65: residence in Hammonton (southern New Jersey), apparently not in Univ. ministry

1865-66: LAJ serves Cortland, NY church; rocking relations with NY State Universalists

1866: move to Binghamton New York and establish water cure practice

1868: LAJ published 2 of 3 autobiographical articles in *Christian Ambassador*

1869: Dec: Grace Jenkins born

1874: March: first at Water Cure home and office

1874: May 7: died, buried Fort Hill Cemetery, Auburn, NY

CODA: POST LAJ: ESJ remarriage, new daughter; move to Elmira; Grace marriage, children;
ESJ d. 1909

Before 1880: ESJ married Emi Kinne

1883: Maude Jenkins born

1886: moved to Elmira, New York: establish water cure practice

1895: Grace married George Kinley

1909: ESJ died, buried in Elmira

1911: Emma died

Before 1930: Grace died

1977: Maude died