

*The Life and Works of
Mary Charlotte Ward Granniss Webster Billings:
Universalist Author, Missionary, and Minister (1824-1904)*

Paper Presentation and Study Session:

Collegium: the Retreat for UU Scholars
October 23-26, 2003

St. Francis Retreat Center, San Juan Bautista, CA 95045

Dr. Barbara Coeyman
Austin, Texas

512-453-2026, 503-806-7593 (cell)
bcoeyman@uuma.org, barbrevbarb@aol.com

Summary of Paper

We know well that many accomplished women have been left out of modern histories, including histories of Unitarianism and Universalism. One such woman whose story is well worth uncovering is Mary Billings, who was born and well-educated in Litchfield, CT; well-traveled in Europe and the USA; well-published in Universalist as well as 'secular' publications; and well-loved by all who knew her. Mary lived the last twenty years of her life in Hico, Texas. There she established the state Universalist mission church with her third husband, Rev. James Billings, and where she herself was ordained at the age of 65.

In addition to surveying Mary's life and works, this northeastern-born presenter now living in Texas will also speculate on what it may have been like for Mary to pursue the missionary spirit of the liberal church on the American frontier one hundred years ago. The paper includes 1) an introduction, which includes speculation on the importance of history in congregation and religious life, and the importance of remembering the women as we write our own histories; 2) Mary's youth, including the cultural and religious environment of Connecticut in the early 19th century; 3) Mary's first marriage, to silk merchant Frederick Granniss, and life in Hartford in mid-century; 4) Mary's second marriage, to Universalist minister Charles Henry Webster, and new spheres for women after the Civil War; and 5) Mary's third marriage and life in Texas, through her death in 1904.

Outline of Collegium Study Session Following Paper

- Review of written paper previously distributed (pink cover page)
- Themes and questions
- Summary of Mary's Texas Ministry ('Marriage Three'), text available today (blue cover page)
- Questions, discussion