

Unitarian Universalists Honored by UUAM's Membership Categories

*Biographies of Clara Barton, Charles Darwin, Rachel Carson, and Albert Schweitzer
by Rev. Gary Kowalski. Biography of Henry Bergh by [Mark Ferguson](#).*

1. **Henry Bergh** (August 29, 1811-March 12, 1888) was the founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and was instrumental in the founding of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. He was the first to successfully challenge the prevailing view that both animals and children were property with no rights of their own. Because of him, it is now accepted that abuse of animals and children is an offense to both human sensibility and established law.



Henry was born to wealth in New York City. His parents were Elizabeth Ivers and Christian Bergh, a ship builder who was for a time employed by the government. He attended Columbia College in New York, but did not complete a degree. Instead he traveled to Europe, 1831-36, where he dabbled in the arts and attempted a career in writing. In 1836 he married Catherine Matilda (née Taylor). Henry and his brother, Christian Jr., took over the family business upon the retirement of their father. After his father's death in 1843, Henry cashed in his inheritance, became a man of privileged leisure, and moved with his wife to Europe, where he wrote several unsuccessful plays.

In 1863 President Abraham Lincoln appointed him to the American Legation at the court of Czar Alexander II in Russia. While in Russia, Bergh witnessed commonplace abuse of animals. His experience in Russia, and related incidents in other European countries, heightened Bergh's sensitivity and compassion. In 1865, en route back to the United States, Bergh stopped in London to consult with the Earl of Harrowby, president of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Animals were routinely abused and neglected in America at the time. Horses, a major source of conveyance, were starved, denied regular watering, beaten, and no concessions were made them for extremes of weather. Mules and horses were typically released into the streets to starve after judged no longer fit for service. Domestic animals were often not given regular food or shelter and were subject to physical abuse. Dogfights, cockfights, and bear-baiting were common forms of entertainment.

Bergh used his wealth and prestige to raise public awareness of the suffering of animals and to enlist support from powerful New York businessmen, politicians, and religious leaders in the founding of the ASPCA. Among these was his minister, Henry Whitney Bellows of the First Congregational Church of New York City (now the Unitarian Church of All Souls). In 1866 Bergh gave a lecture at Clinton Hall in New York citing statistics and examples relating to

animal abuse. This was the inception of the American Society. Laws granting a charter for the society and punishing cruelty to animals were passed by the State of New York two months later. When asked about the founding of the ASPCA, Bergh commented, "This is a matter purely of conscience; it has no perplexing side issues. It is a moral question in all its aspects."

Bergh, realizing that the ASPCA could not be run as a solely male organization, asked Bellows to provide names of women as potential patrons. This increased Unitarian support for his work. On the other hand, because of the mistreatment and mishandling of animals in P. T. Barnum's circus acts, Bergh initially had an adversarial relationship with the Universalist showman. Nevertheless Bergh eventually won Barnum over to the cause.

President of the ASPCA from 1866 until his death, Bergh daily intervened on behalf of mistreated animals on the streets of New York. Wearing a special badge, he arrested and prosecuted violators of the state anti-cruelty laws. An early entry in the ASPCA annals: "New York City, April 1866: The driver of a cart laden with coal is whipping his horse. Passersby . . . stop to gawk not so much at the weak, emaciated equine, but at the tall man, elegant in top hat and spats, who is explaining to the driver that it is now against the law to beat one's animal. Thus, America first encounters 'The Great Meddler.'"

With the help of his legal counsel, Elbridge Gerry, Bergh got the federal government to ban cruelty to animals used for interstate transportation. He also made lecture tours outside New York State, which inspired the foundation of a number of local anti-cruelty societies.

Bergh once noted that "Mercy to animals means mercy to mankind." This idea led him to work for better conditions for humans as well. Through the intervention of Methodist mission worker, Etta Angell Wheeler, he was introduced to the suffering of a child, Mary Ellen Wilson. Mary Ellen had endured extreme physical and mental abuse in her foster home. Friends of Wheeler suggested that she seek Bergh's assistance and support. Claiming at the court hearing that his advocacy was "that of a human citizen," he was instrumental removing Wilson from her abusive home. In New York City in 1875 he and Gerry co-founded the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

After long years of witness and action against cruelty, Bergh died in 1888. He is buried in Green Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York. In extending concern for all living beings, Bergh anticipated the Seventh Principle of the Unitarian Universalist Association: "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." The Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry salutes his pioneering work.

2. **Clara Barton**, born in 1821, was reared a Universalist and kept the faith till her death in 1912. She is renowned as the founder of the American Red Cross and honored for her work as a nurse during the Civil War. But her sensitivity and compassion extended to animals, also. In *The Story of My Childhood*, published in 1907, Clara recalled a transforming moment from her youth:



“One afternoon on going to the barn as usual I found no cows there all had been driven somewhere else. As I stood in the corner of the great yard alone I saw three or four men the farm hands with one stranger among them wearing a long loose shirt or gown.

They were all trying to get a large red ox onto the barn floor to which he went very reluctantly. At length they succeeded. One of the men carried an axe and stepping a little to the side and back raised it high in the air and brought it down with a terrible blow. The ox fell. I fell too and the next I knew I was in the house on a bed and all the family about me with the traditional camphor bottle bathing my head to my great discomfort. As I regained consciousness they asked me what made me fall. I said some one struck me. Oh no, they said, no one struck you, but I was not to be convinced and proceeded to argue the case with an impatient putting away of the hurting hands, “then what makes my head so sore?” Happy ignorance! I had not then learned the mystery of nerves.

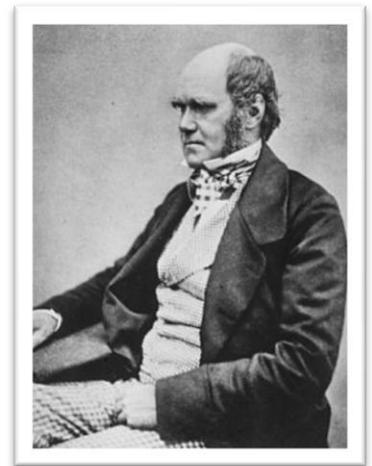
I have however a very clear recollection of the indignation of my father (my mother had already expressed herself on the subject) on his return from town and hearing what had taken place. The hired men were lined up and arraigned for cruel carelessness. They had the consideration to keep the cattle away, he said, but allowed that little girl to stand in full view. Of course each protested he had not seen me.

I was altogether too friendly with the farm hands to hear them blamed, especially on my account, and came promptly to their side assuring my father that they had not seen me and that it was no matter, I was all well now. But singularly, I lost all desire for meat if I had ever had it, and all through life to the present have only eaten it when I must for the sake of appearance or as circumstances seemed to make it the more proper thing to do. The bountiful ground has always yielded enough for all my needs and wants.”

The Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry celebrates Clara Barton, a lifelong vegetarian.

3. **Charles Darwin** did more than any other thinker to erase the hard boundary separating human beings from other living creatures. Sharing a common ancestor, people are related to animals not only biologically, but mentally and emotionally as well.

In his 1872 publication *The Expression of Emotions in Animals and Man*, Darwin observed some of the special affinities between people and other primates, finding the latter's capacities for joy and sorrow "closely analogous to those of man." If a young chimpanzee is tickled (and he noted that "the armpits are sensitive to tickling, as in the case of our children"), a chuckling or laughing sound is uttered, with the corners of the mouth drawn back and lower eyelids wrinkled, like our own. "Young Orangs, when tickled, likewise grin and make a chuckling sound; and Mr. Martin says that their eyes grow brighter. As soon as their laughter ceases, an expression may be detected



passing over their faces, which, as Mr. Wallace remarked to me, may be called a smile." At the same time, "the appearance of dejection in young oranges and chimpanzees, when out of health, is as plain and almost as pathetic as in the case of our children. This state of mind and body is shown by their listless movements, fallen countenances, dull eyes, and changed complexion."

He includes several accounts of monkeys in grief actually shedding tears. Any objective observer, Darwin judges, "will be forced to admit that the movements of their features and their gestures are almost as expressive as those of man." Whatever differences exist between people and other animals are differences of degree, he concluded, not differences of kind.

Darwin himself struggled with the moral implications of his theory. A lifelong animal lover who surrounded himself with dogs and other pets (Darwin's turtle died only recently, at the age of 176), he was aghast at any form of cruelty or abuse. As an angler, he regularly dipped his worms in brine before impaling them on the hook, to render the little creatures senseless. His son relates how the great biologist returned from his afternoon walk one day shaken and pale from encountering a draughtsman mistreating his horse, agitated from having remonstrated with the man. The thought of any creature in pain was almost unbearable, and in a letter to Professor Ray Lancaster, he confessed that the practice of experimentation on living beings made him "sick with horror." Darwin mused, "Every one has heard of the dog suffering under vivisection, who licked the hand of the operator; this man, unless the operation was fully justified by an increase of our knowledge, or unless he had a heart of stone, must have felt remorse to the last hour of his life." While animal research might be a terrible necessity in some circumstances, he felt, it should never be pursued for "mere damnable and detestable curiosity." His own work laid the cornerstone for modern biology, but required no lab animals. With a better understanding than most of how closely we are all related, the great scientist was also a great humanitarian.

Though he struggled with the religious implications of evolutionary theory throughout his life, Charles Darwin was reared in a Unitarian family, while the Unitarian Church in Shrewsbury, England, has a memorial tablet to Darwin which says he was "a member of and a constant worshipper in this church." The Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry proudly claims him as a forerunner of our own vision and values.

Two hundred years after his birth, the time has arrived to complete the revolution Darwin started, by understanding that other living creatures are members of our moral community—sensitive social beings like ourselves--as well as our biological kin.

4. **Rachel Carson** is considered the founder of the modern environmental movement.

Her book *Silent Spring* (dedicated to Albert Schweitzer, another friend of animals) galvanized the public to the dangers of man made toxins and led to a ban of DDT, which was decimating populations of songbirds and raptors.

Yet temperamentally, she was more poet than provocateur, more mystic than muckraker. As she said, the gift she would impart to



every child is an indestructible sense of wonder—glad appreciation the everyday miracles of singing birds and silver rain—for “it is not half so important to know as to feel,” in her words.

In *The Sea Around Us*, she wrote lyrically of exploring the beach at night, finding a small ghost crab in the beam of her torch, “lying in a pit he had dug just above the surf, as though watching the sea and waiting. The blackness of the night possessed water, air and beach. It was the darkness of an older world,” before the dawn of human witness. “I had seen hundreds of ghost crabs in other settings, but suddenly I was filled with the odd sensation that for the first time I knew the creature in its own world—that I understood, as never before, the essence of its being. In that moment time was suspended; the world to which I belonged did not exist and I might have been an onlooker from outer space. The little crab alone with the sea became a symbol that stood for life itself—for the delicate, destructible, yet incredibly vital force that somehow holds its place amid the harsh realities of the inorganic world.” For Rachel, even a lowly crustacean could be a Thou, a divine subject rather merely an object of study, a being to whom she might feel emotionally bonded and spiritually akin.

She was one of the first nature writers to spin her yarns from the animal’s point of view, as in her first title *Under the Sea Wind*, where she followed the fate a little sandpiper she named Blackfoot on his annual migration from the Canadian Arctic to Patagonia 12,000 miles away. To do so, she had to enter imaginatively into the bird’s reality, asking “how does a breaking wave (a) sound and (b) look to sanderlings?” For her, the ocean was never a desolate or lonely place, but one filled with soaring thoughts and enlivening companions.

Yet like the bird guided surely on its long flight, Carson had a homing sense for truth and her science was dead on. Fascinating, for instance, that nearly sixty years ago, Carson observed that “now in our own lifetime we are witnessing a startling alteration of climate ... The frigid top of the world is very clearly warming up.” Without being able to pinpoint the precise cause, she reported on icefields like Alaska’s Muir Glacier receding over ten kilometers in the space of a dozen years. But she reasoned it must have something to do with changing currents and warming water, calling the ocean’s the earth’s great thermostat. Hers was an intellect as restless and roving as the sea itself.

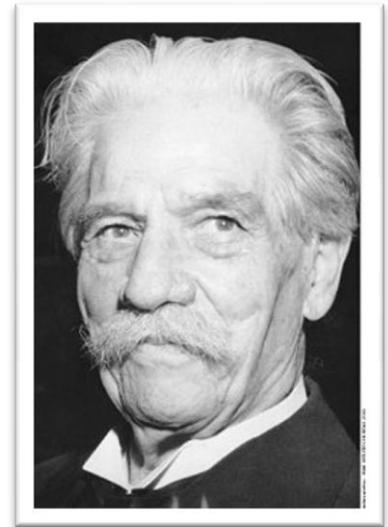
Science and faith—or least a certain kind of faith—fit together in her way of looking at things, for both ask insistent questions about our universe. Our Unitarian Universalist faith, in particular, is better at questioning our answers than answering our questions.

So it was appropriate for Rachel Carson to request that her final farewell take place at the All Souls Unitarian Church in New York, where the minister, Duncan Howlett, had companioned her through her final illness. She wanted a simple ceremony, without fanfare, attended by her closest friends. Sadly, her estranged brother Robert seized control, and the official funeral was held at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., with U.S. Senators for pallbearers and eulogies from an Episcopal bishop she’d never met. The following day, the more genuine, intimate parting took place in the Unitarian chapel, where the minister read from Rachel’s own reflections, watching the flight of butterflies as they set out on a migration from which none would ever return. “For the monarch,” Carson mused, “that cycle is measured in a known span of months.” For the rest of us, the measure is something else, the span of which we cannot know. But the thought is the same: when the intangible cycle has run its course it is a natural and not unhappy thing that a life comes to its end.

The Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry salutes Rachel Carson and continues her work, educating people about the wonder, intricacy and irreplaceable value of earth's creatures and living systems.

5. There are some figures who belong not to any one country or culture but to the world at large. They seem to transcend their particular time and place and in their differing ways show us glimpses of the good, the true and the beautiful. And it would be rare indeed to find one individual who combined every form of genius—at once spiritual and scientific, both an artist and a humanitarian. Yet one man, **Albert Schweitzer**, fit that description.

He was born in Alsace, on the border region of Germany and France, the son of a Protestant pastor. And from the time of his birth in 1875, he was given to an exceptional sensitivity toward the feelings of others. "As far back as I can remember," he recalled in his memoirs, "I was saddened by the amount of misery I saw in the world around me.



Youth's unqualified *joie de vivre* I never really knew." As the son of a pastor, he was far from rich. The house was often damp and cold. The boy at times had to wear his one thin summer suit through the long, bitter winter. And on the church stipend her husband earned, Albert's mother could only afford to offer the children two large bowls of gruel for the meals each day. But at least they had a home and food on the table. "One day on the way home from school, I had to wrestle with George Nitschelm, who was bigger than I, and was supposed to be stronger, but I got him down," Albert remembered.

"While he was lying under me, he jerked out, 'Yes if I got broth to eat twice a week, as you do, I should be as strong as you are!' I staggered home, overcome by this finish to our play," smarting under the awareness that as the preacher's boy, he occupied a privileged rung on the social ladder.

After that, the youngster began to consciously share in the deprivations of his playmates. "I had been given an overcoat made out of an old one of my fathers," but knowing that no other village boys had warm coats, Albert refused to wear the winter garment even when his father boxed his ears. From the earliest age, he was finely tuned to the world around, to its beauty as well as sorrow.

His receptivity showed in a passion for music. In second-grade, the instructor who taught penmanship also gave singing lessons to the older students. One day in the infant school, Albert stood outside the classroom waiting for his lessons while the chorus inside finished their rehearsal. "When they began the vocal duet," he says, "I had to hold onto the wall to prevent myself from falling. The charm of the two-part harmony thrilled me all over, to my very marrow, and similarly the first time I heard brass instruments playing together I almost fainted from excess of pleasure." By age five, he was at the keyboard, and playing the organ before his feet could reach the pedals.

If a musical chord set him ringing, life's dissonant notes left him jarred and shaken, especially the discord of violence inflicted on the innocent. "One thing that specially saddened me was that the unfortunate animals had to suffer so much pain and misery," he reminisced. "The sight of an old limping horse, tugged forward by one man while another kept beating it with a stick to get it to the knacker's yard, haunted me for weeks.

"It was quite incomprehensible to me—this was before I began going to school—why in my evening prayers I should pray for human beings only. So when my mother had prayed with me and had kissed me good-night, I used to add silently a prayer that I had composed myself for all living creatures. It ran thus: 'Oh, heavenly Father, protect and bless all things that have breath; guard them from all evil, and let them sleep in peace.'" A little older, Albert twice tried fishing with rod and line when the other boys invited him along, "but this sport was soon made impossible for me," he relates, "by the treatment of the worms that were put on the hook for bait, and the wrenching of the mouths of the fishes that were caught. I gave it up," he concludes, "and even found courage enough to dissuade other boys from going."

Albert was obviously a thoughtful child who raised questions that sometimes made his friends and even older adults uncomfortable. "When I was eight my father, at my request, gave me a New Testament, which I read eagerly," he recounts. "Among the stories which interested me most was that of the Three Wise Men from the East. What did the parents of Jesus do, I asked myself, with the gold and other valuables which they got from these men? How could they have been poor after that? And that the Wise Men should never have troubled themselves again about the Child Jesus was to me incomprehensible. The absence, too, of any record of the shepherds of Bethlehem becoming disciples, gave me a severe shock." As doubtless his Sunday School teachers were also shocked by such precocious and unusual ponderings.

The bright boy grew to be a brilliant youth. By the time he was thirty he was the head of a theological seminary with doctorates in religion and philosophy, the author of a landmark volume on *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* as well as book length treatments of Bach in German and French, quickly gaining an international reputation for his mastery of the organ, as both musician and instrument-builder. Schweitzer was pushing himself at a phenomenal pace, pouring a lifetime of achievement into three decades, knowing that his time was limited. For at the age of twenty-one, the young man had made a solemn vow. Waking from a restful sleep at his home in Günsbach, with sunlight streaming through the open windows and sounds of birdsong on the wind, he asked himself what he had done to deserve such good fortune, to be blessed with such robust physical health, so much intellectual vigor, such raw talent? At that moment, on the cusp of manhood, he had sworn to spend nine more years, until the age of thirty, pursuing his personal interests as a scholar and artist, then to give himself over entirely to the service of humanity. Medicine became the medium as on his 30th birthday he embarked on eight more years of study to equip himself for Africa. As a doctor, he said, he could do more and talk less. And he realized that the Paris missionary society sending him to the French colony of Gabon would only tolerate him if he kept his mouth shut. He could never be an evangelist or preaching missionary. For although Schweitzer understood the extraordinary self-sacrifice he was making as a form of obedience to the teachings of Jesus—"whoever shall save his life shall lose it for my sake"—other Christians looked at him askance.

In his years of Biblical research, Schweitzer had come to the conclusion that Jesus was a fallible human being, not a God-Man living on the plane of timeless truth, but a product of his history

and culture. Jesus was above all an apocalyptic prophet, a messianic Jew who believed God's righteous kingdom was about to arrive on earth, but who was clearly mistaken in predicting a speedy end to the world. His words couldn't be taken verbatim. And what Jesus believed long ago, in a pre-scientific era, couldn't and shouldn't be the measure for our own understanding of the world.

Schweitzer's study of medicine only confirmed his devotion to gathering insight through observation and experiment rather than referencing revelation. In contrast to the church, where doctrines could be endlessly disputed, at medical school he found himself "among men who took it as a matter of course that they had to justify with facts every statement they made." Chemistry, physics, botany, zoology, all subjects where exactitude reigned, left him thrilled with the certainty of knowledge they offered. Yet like so many thinkers of the modern world, Schweitzer wondered where the bridge could be found between science and the humanities, between facts and values, between physical laws and moral laws, between the head and heart.

The answer came just two years after he'd arrived in Africa, on a hot summer's day as he journeyed upstream along the river from Cape Lopez to N'gomo to treat the wife of another missionary who's fallen ill. Lost in thought aboard the slow moving barge, Schweitzer in his autobiography says he was searching for the universal conception which could finally join reason with religion. He was baffled, covering pages of his notebooks with disconnected musings. "Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase 'Reverence for Life.'" *Erhfurcht vor dem Leben*. The German phrase that became his touchstone means "reverence for life," but more than that, too. *Erfurcht* has connotations of amazement, awe, and soul-stirring power. So that to behold the world and its creatures with real reverence is to be transformed by the vision—transformed from indifference to compassion, to become a co-participant in both the travail and holiness of the earth.

Ethics had previously been concerned exclusively with how we treat other people. But now, inspired by the profusion of the primeval forest, the grace of the heron rising from the reedy bank, the baby monkeys and pelicans he befriended and tamed as pets, the mystery of the traveler ants in their relentless marches across the jungle floor-- Schweitzer sought to widen the circle, believing that only a morality based in nature could meet the needs of an evolutionary, ecological age. He wrote, "A tree grows, bears fruit—then, after a certain time, it no longer grows, it loses its leaves, its branches wither. What happens? Why is the energy checked? Because it did not sink deep enough roots into the earth on which it stands. Anyone who has to do with trees knows what I mean. The same thing—I thought to myself—has happened with us humans. Humanity has not had deep enough roots. It has not found sustenance and fresh impetus, because the ethical code on which it was based was too narrow and did not have a deep foundation. It has concerned itself only with human beings. It has given only a passing nod to our relationship with other living creatures, looking upon it as a nice bit of sentimentality, quite innocuous but of no great significance. But it did have significance. For only if we have an ethical attitude in our thinking about all living creatures does our humanity have deep roots and a rich flowering that cannot wither."

Only a philosophy grounded in life could truly serve life. So when Rachel Carson dedicated her book *Silent Spring* to Dr. Schweitzer in 1962, just three years before his death, she called him "the one truly great individual our modern times have produced." In his calls for an end to

atmospheric nuclear testing, for which he received the Peace Prize, Schweitzer was like Carson herself, who warned again poisoning nature, both forerunners of the modern environmental movement.

Schweitzer ended his years at the hospital in Lambarene where he had spent the better part of his life fighting leprosy and malaria, dysentery and elephantiasis and other tropical diseases. During many of those years, including a term served in wartime detention, he was joined by his wife Helen Bresslau, who trained as a nurse to assist in his work. The facility they began as a corrugated iron rectangle, 26 feet long and just half as wide, topped with a roof of palm leaves, is now a hospital that sees 50,000 patients a year with units for pediatrics, maternity, and all the other specializations of modern medical care.

But in the end, Schweitzer remained modest about his accomplishments. Not everyone, he counseled, had the resources he'd been given to sacrifice and serve on such an heroic scale. Yet all could make a difference. "Whatever more than others you have received in health, natural gifts, working capacity, success, a beautiful childhood, harmonious family circumstances, you must not accept as being a matter of course," he suggested. "You must pay a price for them." Open your eyes and look for a human being, or some work devoted to human welfare, which needs from someone a little time or friendliness, a little sympathy, or sociability, or labor. There may be a solitary or embittered man, an invalid or an inefficient person to whom you can be something. Perhaps it is an old person or a child. Who can enumerate the many ways in which that costly piece of working capital, a human being, can be employed. Search, then, for some investment for your humanity."

Albert Schweitzer was a member of the Unitarian Church of Capetown, South Africa, and accepted an honorary membership in the UU Church of the Larger Fellowship. The Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry shares his vision of an ethic that embraces the inherent worth and beauty of all living creatures.