



A CANADIAN UNITARIAN ALMANAC AND LITURGICAL CALENDAR

Rev. Stefan M. Jonasson
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GENERAL FESTIVALS AND CELEBRATIONS

THORRABLÓT (or "ÞORRABLÓT" in Icelandic script) is a pagan midwinter feast day dating from the Saga Age in Iceland, although it fell into disfavour during the Christian era – especially during the puritanical 17th and 18th centuries, when it was illegal to hold pagan *blóts*, or feasts. Thorrablót was revived in 1867 by *Kvöldfélagið*, or the Evening Society, a secret society akin to the Masons. When full religious freedom was restored in 1874, the first public Thorrablót was held in the northern Icelandic town of Akureyri. The feast usually involves a hearty meal of traditional Icelandic foodstuffs, accompanied by the drinking of toasts to the pantheon of pagan deities – Óðin, Þór, Freyja, Frigg, Freyr, Njörður, Bragi and Baldur, to name a few! While this feast may be held anytime during the month of Thorri, which begins on the Friday between January 19 and 25, it is best held on the first day of that month. It has become a popular "secular" event among people of Icelandic heritage in North America but the roots of its revival can be traced to the Icelandic Unitarian romantics of the early twentieth century, who did much to rekindle interest in Iceland's pagan roots.

SPRING EQUINOX – March 21. The day on which winter formally gives way to spring, unless one happens to live in most parts of Canada, where winter gives way to something that still looks a lot like winter. Since ancient times, people celebrated the turning of the season, as the daytime began to grow longer than the night. In Northern Europe, this was also the feast day of Idunn, the Norse goddess who was keeper of the golden apples, which kept the deities young.

PALM SUNDAY – The day on which Magnús Skaptason first preached his *Easter Sermon*, which led to the withdrawal of five churches from the Icelandic Lutheran Synod (1891).

EASTER – Variable. While Unitarian Universalists generally approach Easter in a different spirit than most of their religious neighbours, it remains one of the most heavily attended Sundays in UU churches.

SUMARDAGURINN FYRSTI – "The First Day of Summer" – which falls on the Thursday between April 19 and 25. In Iceland, this day was reckoned as the beginning of the year. It was customary to bake special summer cakes (rye bread, really) and pile a full day's share of foodstuffs upon them, for sharing equally among all members of the community. Before birthday and Christmas gifts were common, the Icelanders exchanged "summer gifts" on this day. While the day was taken as a holiday, it was the practice to perform a few symbolic "first works" to launch the summer season. Mostly, though, it is regarded as a day for children. The churches held *messa* (worship, or "mass") on this day until doing so

was banned by royal decree in 1744. The Sunday following *Sumardagurinn Fyrsti* was observed as a special celebration in many of the Icelandic Unitarian congregations.

MAY DAY – May 1 – One of the major pagan festivals, May Day remained popular in Northern Europe even after the Christianization of the continent. Since 1889, International Labour Day has been observed on May Day.

MOTHER'S DAY – second Sunday of May. In 1872, Unitarian Julia Ward Howe began advocating the creation of a "Mother's Day for Peace" to be held on June 2 each year. The following year, eighteen cities held such a gathering. Bostonians continued to observe the day for more than a decade, while some cities continued the observance until the turn of the century, when the annual "Mother's Day for Peace" appears to have died out. In 1907, Anna Jarvis, a Methodist, began a campaign to establish a permanent Mother's Day. By the following year, the YMCA had taken up the cause and, in 1914, Woodrow Wilson signed a congressional resolution establishing Mother's Day in the United States. In time, the day came to be marked in many other countries. Jarvis was troubled by the commercialization of the day, saying, "I wanted it to be a day of sentiment, not profit." Inalterably opposed to the sale of flowers (but not the giving of homegrown blossoms), she also lamented the advent of the Mother's Day card, describing it as "a poor excuse for the letter you are too lazy to write." Interestingly enough, Mother's Day is the most heavily attended Sunday in North American churches, outside of the Christmas and Easter seasons! In Unitarian Universalist congregations, the day has increasingly taken on a sense of being a day to mark the contributions of all women and not just mothers.

WHITSUNDAY – "White Sunday," also known as Pentecost – falls on the seventh Sunday after Easter (May 10 – June 14). The traditional Christian festival marking the descent of the Holy Spirit (as in, "Spirit of Life, come unto me ..."), Whitsunday also loosely coincides with the *Shavuot*, the Jewish festival that commemorates Moses' receipt of the tablets containing the Ten Commandments and honors the devotion of Ruth. The most common day for adult baptism in Northern Europe – the name comes from the white robes that were worn – the Icelandic Unitarians favoured this Sunday for the confirmation of young people as members of the church when they came of age. (In the past, Icelanders believed it a bad omen to sleep during the daylight hours on this day.)

FLOWER COMMUNION – Variable spring date, often sometime in June – Unitarian Universalists trace the celebration of the Flower Communion to a special service led by Rev. Norbert Capek at the Unitarian Church in Prague, Czechoslovakia, on June 4, 1923. The service was introduced to North Americans in 1940, when it was first celebrated at the First Parish in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

MIDSUMMER – The Summer Solstice – is the longest day of the year. It is a common celebration in the countries of Northern Europe. The morning dew of Midsummer was held to be a cure-all for various ills, especially skin conditions. While its full restorative effect requires one to roll around in it naked, people of more modest temperament content themselves to walk barefoot in the dew or symbolically wash their hands and arms in it.

CANADA DAY – July 1. Despite our aspirations to universality and world community, it remains true that religious experience is conditioned by our social context, especially by the national environment in which we dwell. It is therefore fitting that national holidays be marked as religious as well as secular events, if only to bring the universal values of faith to bear on the life of the nation. For Canadians, our national holiday offers us an opportunity to reflect upon the shared values of "the chalice and the maple leaf."

ÍSLENDINGADAGURINN – “Icelander’s Day” – falls on the first Monday of August, which happily coincides with the Civic Holiday observed in most provinces. Its modern observance dates to the grand festival that was held in 1874 to mark the millennium of the settlement of Iceland. King Christian IX of Denmark presented the country with its own constitution at that event.

LABOUR DAY – first Monday in September. Often thought of as the last weekend of the summer, this holiday offers the opportunity to reflect upon the meaning of vocation, as well as appreciate the work of those whose everyday labour meets our needs. Horace Westwood considered the Sunday of this weekend to be an especially important day in the life of the liberal churches. The North American tradition of Labour Day, which differs from practices in other parts of the world, owes its origin to the “workingman’s demonstration” organized by the Toronto Trades Assembly in 1872, which began the custom of labour parades on this continent.

AUTUMN EQUINOX – September 21. The counterpoint to the spring equinox, this most ignored of the four stations of the year is worth our observance. First of all, it’s simply honest to remember that autumn is as much a reality of life as the springtime. Beyond that, it is around this time that the new church year is *really* fully underway, making it as good a time for “homecoming” as any.

THANKSGIVING – second Monday in October. A modern expression of the ancient harvest festivals, which resonates with many Unitarian Universalists because of the historical association of Thanksgiving in the United States with the story of the *Mayflower* and the Pilgrims. The First Parish in Plymouth, Massachusetts – once commonly known as the “Church of the Pilgrim Fathers” (not to mention the Pilgrim Mothers) – became Unitarian in 1801. Of course, the origins of Thanksgiving are much more complex and universal, being rooted in the traditions of Harvest Home and other harvest festivals.

UNITED NATIONS DAY – October 24. Our affirmation of “the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all” makes United Nations Day a *holy* day for Unitarian Universalists and not merely a secular observance.

REFORMATION SUNDAY – Last Sunday in October. Marked by Lutherans and other Protestants as the anniversary of the day, in 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of Wittenberg’s castle church, the fact that this event never actually happened shouldn’t prevent us from continuing to observe the spirit of the day. After all, Unitarian Universalists are the quintessential protestors of the church universal, the “protestants of all protestants,” who honour Francis Dávid’s call to *semper reformanda* – the continuing reformation.

ALL SOULS DAY – November 2 (observed on the Sunday falling between October 27 and November 2) – What day from the liturgical calendar of the Christian tradition could be more fitting for Unitarian Universalists to observe than All Souls Day?

WINTER SOLSTICE – December 21. For those Unitarian Universalists with reservations about Christmas, the Winter Solstice has come to be the focal point of the winter holiday season. It is interesting to note that this day has found favour among both humanists and pagans, making it perhaps the one occasion in the year when they can overlook their differences and stand on common ground.

CHRISTMAS EVE – December 24. Christmas Eve has become the common day to celebrate the winter holiday season among Canadian Unitarian Universalists. In Winnipeg,

by contrast, this practice dates only from the 1960s. Before then, the "English" congregation held its Christmas service on the Sunday prior to Christmas, while the Icelandic congregation held its service on Christmas morning – *Jóladagsmessa* (or "Yule Day Mass"). Among the Icelanders, Christmas Eve was reserved for family gatherings and, since both congregations shared the same Icelandic minister after 1935, he was not available to the "English" congregation at that time! From 1949 onward, the two congregations met for a shared service whenever Christmas Day fell on a Sunday. In 1950, the Bishop of Iceland preached at a landmark Christmas Eve service at the Unitarian Church in Winnipeg. (On a personal note, I have a growing distaste for the trend towards eclectic content at Christmas Eve services. A humanist myself, I have an intuition that, when we gather for worship on Christmas Eve, we come having suspended our disbelief, prepared to immerse ourselves in the myth and legends long associated with Christmas. If we cannot approach this evening in such a spirit, there seems to be little to commend our gathering, other than force of habit. When that's the case, it would be more fitting to forego gathering on Christmas Eve altogether and restrict our seasonal observances to the Sundays before and after, or perhaps gather on the Winter Solstice instead.)

GAMLÁRSKVÖLD – "Old Year's Evening" – was observed at the Unitarian Church in Winnipeg on December 31 each year, until about thirty years ago. I remember it as "Burning Out the Old Year." A large bonfire was lit in the church yard and the congregation, which was sometimes larger than Christmas Eve, gathered around it. In Iceland, it was believed that on New Year's Eve, the dead rose from their graves, the Huldufolk moved house, cows were able to speak (no doubt aided by the "spirits"), and seals assumed human form. During the evening, the *óskastund*, or "wishing moment," occurred. Pious observers of this occasion give thanks for the old year while offering wishes for a good year to their family, friends and neighbours.

DAYS OF HISTORICAL NOTE – CANADA and CANADIANS

January 14 – Birth of Amos "King" Seaman (Wood Creek, New Brunswick, 1788; died 1864), entrepreneur and Universalist benefactor, known as "The Grindstone King" because of the grindstone quarries he owned and operated at Minudie, Nova Scotia. Founder of A. Seaman and Company in 1806, a shipping and trading enterprise. He heard his first Universalist sermon at Portland, Maine, in 1829 and later built a Universalist church in Minudie, which was completed in 1863.

January 15 – Birth of T.B. (Trowbridge Brigham) Forbush (Westboro, Massachusetts, 1832; died 1898), Western Superintendent of the American Unitarian Association (1889-96) during the formative period of the Icelandic Unitarian Mission in Western Canada.

January 17 – Birth of A. Eustace Haydon (Ontario, 1880), professor of comparative religion at the University of Chicago Divinity School (1919-45), minister of the First Unitarian Society of Madison (1918-23) and leader of the Chicago Ethical Society (1945-55). Haydon was a signer of the Humanist Manifesto in 1933. He was educated in Ontario and served as a Baptist minister at Dresden before leaving to pursue an academic career in Chicago.

January 21 – (1856) The congregation of the Christian Unitarian Society of Montréal, dealing with a conflict between a board member and its minister (see November 4), settled the question of whether the church's polity would be presbyterian or congregational, opting for the latter. At a special meeting, the congregation approved a resolution stating, "That this Society delegates no power whatever to the Deacons or Elders by which their Minister is

to consider himself in any way responsible to them for his teachings or ancts any more than to any individual member of the Society.”

January 22 – Birth of Luther H. Holton (Ontario, 1817; died 1880), entrepreneur and politician. Vice President of the Montréal Free Trade Association (1846), president of the Montréal Chamber of Commerce (1856-59, 1862-63), and an advocate of the annexation of British North America by the United States. He was a business partner of both Alexander T. Galt and C.S. Gzowski and a director of the Grand Trunk Railway. Member of Parliament (Province of Canada, 1854-58, 1862-63), Liberal Member of Parliament (1867-80).

February 1 – (1891) The First Icelandic Unitarian Society of Winnipeg, forerunner of First Unitarian Universalist Church, was organized. It was both the first Icelandic Unitarian congregation and the first Canadian Unitarian congregation west of London, Ontario.

February 1 – (1904) The Ladies' Aid Society of the Icelandic Unitarian Church of Winnipeg (*Kvennfélags Frjálstrúar Safnaðarins í Winnipeg*) organized with Margrét Benedictsson as its first president.

February 4 – Birth of Magnús J. Skaptason (Hnauar, Iceland, 1850; died 1932), minister to Icelandic congregations in New Iceland (1887-94), First Icelandic Unitarian Society of Winnipeg (1894-99), Unitarian Congregation of Roseau, MN (1899-1901), and the Gimli Unitarian Church (1901-03); first president of the Icelandic Unitarian Association (1901-06); newspaper and magazine editor.

February 11 – Birth of Jabez T. Sunderland (Yorkshire, England, 1842), minister of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto (1901-5) and the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa (1912-13), editor and lecturer.

February 22 – Birth of Ragnar E. Kvaran (Winnipeg, 1894; died 1939), minister of the First Federated Church in Winnipeg (1923-1930), the Interlake Unitarian circuit (1930-33), Field Secretary of the American Unitarian Association (1928-33), and President of the United Conference of Iceland Churches (1928-33).

March 3 – Birth of Alexander Graham Bell (Edinburgh, Scotland, 1847; died 1922), scientist and inventor. Best known for his invention of the telephone, he founded the Bell Telephone Company in 1876.

March 8 – Birth of Mavor Moore (Toronto, 1919), actor, playwright, and professor. Professor at York University (1970ff) and chairman of the Canada Council (1979-83). Member of the Order of Canada (1973) and Governor-General's award winner (1999).

March 11 – Birth of John Young (Scotland, 1811; died, 1878), Montréal merchant and parliamentarian. Member of Parliament (Province of Canada, 1851-57), Commissioner of Public Works (1851-52), Liberal Member of Parliament (1872-74).

March 15 – Birth of Joseph T. Thorson (Winnipeg, 1889; died 1978), lawyer and dean of the Manitoba Law School. Liberal Member of Parliament (1926-30, 1935-42), delegate to the League of Nations (1938), Minister of National War Services (1941-42), president of the Exchequer Court of Canada (1942ff), president of the International Commission of Jurists (1952-59). In 1912, he became the first person of Icelandic heritage to win a Rhodes Scholarship. A Unitarian layperson in Winnipeg, he later joined the Anglican Church.

March 16 – Birth of Jennie E. McCaine, a.k.a. Jennie McCaine Peterson (Francestown, NH, 1838; died 1918), general secretary of the Post Office Mission of the Minnesota Unitarian Conference and co-founder, with her husband Björn Pétursson, of the First Icelandic Unitarian Society of Winnipeg in 1891. McCaine's service is recognized in the Jennie

McCaine Peterson Award, which is presented annually by Western Canada District for exemplary volunteer service.

March 16 – Birth of Margrét (Jónsdóttir) Benedicsson (Iceland, 1866), women's suffrage leader, editor of *Freyja* (1898-1910), and founding president of the Women's Society of the First Icelandic Unitarian Church of Winnipeg (1904-5).

March 19 – Birth of Sydney Snow (Winchester, Massachusetts, 1878), minister of the Church of the Messiah (Unitarian) in Montréal (1920-26) and later President of Meadville Theological School in Chicago.

March 19 – Birth of Lloyd Francis (Ottawa, 1920), economist and parliamentarian. Liberal Member of Parliament (1963-65, 1968-72, 1974-89, 1980-84), Deputy Speaker (1980-84) and then Speaker of the House of Commons (1984).

April 4 – Birth of Gudmundur Arnason (Iceland, 1880; died 1943), minister and educator. Minister of the First Icelandic Unitarian Society of Winnipeg (1909-15) and later minister of the Federated Churches (Unitarian) at Oak Point and Lundar (1929-43). President of the United Conference of Icelandic Churches (1933-43) and regional director of the American Unitarian Association (1940-43).

April 8 – Birth of Fidelia (Wooley) Gillette (Nelson, NY, 1827), minister of the "First Universalist Society of the County of Prince Edward" in Bloomfield, Ontario (1888-89) and presumed to be the first ordained woman minister to serve a church of any denomination in Canada.

April 17 – Birth of Albert E. Kristjansson (Iceland, 1877; died 1974), Unitarian minister and politician. He served as minister of Unitarian congregations in Gimli, Manitoba (1910-14), Otto and Mary Hill, Manitoba (1914-28), Icelandic Liberal Church of Seattle (1928-41), First Unitarian Church of Seattle (1931-32), and the Free Church Unitarian in Blaine, Washington (1928-43). President of the United Conference of Icelandic Churches (1914-28). He was briefly a Farmer-Labour Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba (1920-22).

April 19 – Birth of William Irvine (Shetland Islands, 1885; died 1962), minister of the First Unitarian Church of Calgary (1917-1919) and Member of Parliament (Independent Labour, 1921-25; United Farmers of Alberta, 1926-35; CCF, 1945-49).

April 23 – Birth of Benjamin Holmes (Ireland, 1794; died 1865), entrepreneur and politician. Tory and later Reform Member of Parliament (Province of Canada, 1841-51) and, along with the Workman brothers, an advocate of the annexation of British North America by the United States. Vice President of the Grand Trunk Railway (1853-58) and director of the Bank of Montréal (1853-65).

April 23 – Birth of Albert E. Kristjansson (Húsavík, Iceland, 1878), minister of Unitarian churches in the Interlake region of Manitoba (1910-1928) and the Pacific coast (1928-43), Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba (Farmer-Labour, 1920-22).

May 1 – Birth of Emily Howard Stowe *née Jennings* (Norwich, Ontario, 1831; died, 1903), first Canadian woman to practice medicine (1867), founder of the Toronto Women's Literary Club (1876), organizer of the Women's Medical College in Toronto (1883), and founding president of the Dominion Women's Enfranchisement Association (1899). Raised as a Quaker, she joined the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto in 1879.

May 14 – (1961) The Canadian Unitarian Council was established at Boston, Massachusetts, during the annual May meeting that marked the merger of the American Unitarian

Association and the Universalist Church of America. Eleven Canadian congregations were represented at this founding meeting, which approved the bylaws of the new organization.

May 18 – Birth of G. Brock Chisholm (Oakville, 1896; died 1971), psychiatrist and medical administrator. Deputy Minister of Health for Canada (1945-48), first Director General of the World Health Organization (1948-53). He was noted and rather controversial for refuting various superstitions, including teaching children about Santa Claus.

May 21 – Birth of William Workman (County Antrim, Ireland, 1807; died 1878), politician and businessperson. Mayor of Montréal, founder and president of the Bank of Montréal, hardware merchant and builder of the first railway in Canada, reputed to have been the wealthiest man in Canada.

May 26 – Birth of Joseph Workman (Ireland, 1805; died 1894), pioneer psychiatrist and educator. Medical Superintendent of the Provincial Lunatic Asylum in Toronto (1853-75). He was also served as the first chairman of the Toronto Board of Education and as president of the Canadian Medical Association.

May 26 – Birth of Lucius Seth Huntington (Compton, Québec, 1827; died 1886), lawyer and Universalist layperson. Member of Parliament (Province of Canada, 1861-67), Solicitor-General for Lower Canada (1863-64). Liberal Member of Parliament (1867-82), President of the Privy Council (1874-75), Postmaster-General (1875-78). An opponent of confederation but advocate of complete independence, he exposed the financial corruption of the government of Sir John A. Macdonald (The Pacific Scandal), which resulted in the defeat of the Macdonald administration in the House of Commons the following year.

May 28 – Birth of Alexander Workman (Country Antrim, Ireland, 1798; died 1891), Mayor of Ottawa.

June 6 – (1842) Montréal Unitarians assembled to hear the report of a self-appointed organizing committee, leading two weeks later (June 20) to the organization of the first permanent Unitarian congregation in Canada – the Christian Unitarian Society of Montréal. As its effective bond of union, the new congregation declared, "Whereas a belief in the Unity of God – in the divine mission of Jesus Christ – and in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the only rule of Faith and Practice, are Fundamental Principles of Christian Faith – and recognizing these principles, We, the undersigned, for the better governing of ourselves as a Christian Society, do subscribe to the following Constitution."

June 6 – (1877) "The Universalist Convention of the Province of Ontario, Dominion of Canada" was organized at Port Dover on this day.

June 10 – (1945) First meeting of the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada, held at the Church of Our Father (Unitarian) in Ottawa.

June 11 – Birth of Robert Munsch (Pittsburgh, 1945), best-selling children's author.

June 16 – (1901) The first meeting of the Icelandic Unitarian Association at Gimli, Manitoba.

June 17 – Birth of Thomas Workman (Ireland, 1813; died 1889), Montréal merchant and parliamentarian. Liberal Member of Parliament (1867-72, 1875-78).

June 17 – Birth of Friðrik A. Friðriksson (Reykjavík, Iceland, 1896), minister and educator. Minister of the Wynyard Federated (Unitarian) Church (1921-30) and the Free Church Unitarian in Blaine, Washington (1930-33). After his return to Iceland, he became an Archdeacon of the Church of Iceland.

June 27 – Birth of Arthur Lismer (1885), member of the Group of Seven and a Unitarian.

July 3 – Birth of John Cordner (County Antrim, Ireland, 1816), the first settled Unitarian minister in Canada. Minister of the Christian Unitarian Society of Montréal (1843-79) and, upon his retirement from active service, Honorary Minister (1879-93).

July 6 – (1845) First Unitarian worship service in Toronto led by John Cordner.

July 18 – Birth of Margaret Laurence (Neepawa, MB, 1926), novelist. Author of such noteworthy works as *A Jest of God* (1966) and *The Diviners* (1974).

July 29 – (1832) First Unitarian worship service in Canada led by Rev. David Hughes at the Union Schoolroom in Montréal.

August 2 – Birth of Björn Pétursson (Eiðar, Norður-Múlasýsla, Iceland, 1826; died 1893), Unitarian missionary to the Icelandic immigrants in Manitoba and North Dakota (1886-91) and founder of the First Icelandic Unitarian Society of Winnipeg (1891-93). Pétursson was a farmer and Member of the Álthing (Parliament) in Iceland (1859-69, 1873).

August 3 – Birth of George Washington Stephens, Jr. (Montréal, 1866; died 1942), businessperson, politician and diplomat. Liberal Member of the House of Assembly (1905-08), president of the Montréal Harbour Commission (1907-12), and member League of Nations commission governing the Saar territory (1923-27).

August 14 – Birth of Rögnvaldur Pétursson (Skagafjörður, Iceland, 1877; died 1940), minister of the First Icelandic Unitarian Society of Winnipeg (1903-9 and 1915-22), Field Secretary of the American Unitarian Association (1909-28 and 1933-40), founder and president of the Icelandic National League, editor and author.

August 17 – Birth of Horace Westwood (Wakefield, England, 1884), minister of All Souls Church in Winnipeg (1912-19), founder and secretary of the Canadian Unitarian Association (1913-19), Dean of the Pacific Unitarian School for the Ministry (now Starr King), Regional Vice President of the American Unitarian Association, newspaper columnist, author and mission preacher.

August 24 – Birth of Martha Garner Jones (Mechanicsburg, Illinois, 1866; died 1959), Universalist minister. She and her husband, Leon Jones, were among the earliest husband and wife co-ministry teams. Together they served the Universalist churches in Blenheim and Olinda (1901-04) and, after several settlements in the American Midwest, returned to Olinda (1916-21). During their second pastorate in Olinda, they won an amendment to the marriage law in Ontario which recognized the right of women clergy to solemnize marriages.

August 24 – Birth of Thorbergur Thorvaldson (Iceland, 1883), Unitarian layperson, head of the chemistry department at the University of Saskatchewan (1919ff), first Dean of Graduate Studies there (1945ff), president of the Canadian Institute of Chemistry (1941), and developer of alkali-resistant cement.

August 25 – Birth of Arthur Puttee (Folkestone, England, 1868; died 1957), first Labour Member of the Parliament of Canada (1900-04), editor of the labour weekly, *The Voice* (1899-1918). He was the founding president of the English-language Unitarian Church of Winnipeg (later All Souls Church) when it was established in 1904.

August 29 – Birth of Charles Thorson (Winnipeg, 1890; died 1966), cartoonist, brother of Joseph T. Thorson and son-in-law of Fridrik Swanson (who designed the stained-glass windows at the Winnipeg church). A colourful character is his own right (even a bit of a rogue), Thorson is credited with the creation of Bugs Bunny, Elmer Fudd, Little Hiawatha,

Punkinhead, Elmer the Safety Elephant, and Keeko. There is good reason to believe that he was also involved in the creation of Snow White and six of the seven dwarves. (Fittingly perhaps, there is no "Dopey" among the Unitarian cartoonist's characters!) He left Disney Studios when he didn't receive credit for his contributions, a grievance he shared with other artists there.

September 9 – (1832) Unitarian Chapel dedicated in Montréal by Rev. Matthew Harding. The chapel was located on the southwest corner of St. Henry Street and St. Joseph (now Notre Dame Street).

September 9 – (1923) Arborg Unitarian Church organized as the "Federated Congregation of Icelanders at Arborg."

September 10 – (1831) The first Universalist congregation in Canada was gathered on this day at London, Ontario. "The object of this society shall be the cultivation of peace and harmony and the promotion of religion and morality among ourselves and our fellow men."

September 13 – (1845) The first regular meeting of the Christian Universalist Association for Canada West convened at Belleville on this day. (The founding meeting of the Association was held at Smithville on an unspecified day the year before.)

September 15 – Birth of William Howard Taft (Cincinnati, 1857; died 1930), President of the United States (1909-13) and Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court (1921-30). Taft was also president of the General Conference of Unitarian Churches (1915-25), a position akin to that of the moderator of the Unitarian Universalist Association, presiding over the first continental Unitarian conference in Canada, which was convened in Montréal in 1917. Taft himself maintained a summer home at Murray Bay, east of Montréal, where he was a member of that city's Church of the Messiah (Unitarian).

September 16 – (1832) Just one week after dedicating its first chapel, the service at the Unitarian Church in Montréal was "interrupted by one who, more zealous for his own cause than considerate of the rights of others, interrupted the preacher by questions which certainly were, under the circumstances, very ill-advised" – the first heckler in Canadian Unitarian history but not the last!

September 19 – Birth of Douglas Fisher (Sioux Lookout, 1919), journalist, teacher and Unitarian layperson. CCF/NDP Member of Parliament (1957-68).

September 21 – Birth of Rosalie Agnes West (Clark County, South Dakota, 1893; died 1967), Universalist minister. Born of Canadian parents, she was educated in New Brunswick and graduated from McGill University. She married a New Brunswick physician, J. Hinson West, and supported his work as a medical missionary in Labrador and then, sponsored by the Canadian Baptist Board, in India. During more than two decades there, her theology so liberalized that she was not allowed to return there after a two-year furlough in Canada. He worked for the United Church of Canada for three years before joining the staff of the Universalist Church. She was Executive Director of the Association of Universalist Women in Boston (1947-51) and minister of the Universalist Church in Halifax (1951-54).

September 22 – Birth of George Washington Stephens, Sr. (Vermont, 1832), politician and businessperson. President of the Citizens' Gas Company and president of the Canadian Pacific Railway (1880-88). Montréal municipal councillor (1868-79, 1881-82, 1889-92), Liberal Member of the Legislative Assembly (1881-86, 1892-1900).

September 28 – Birth of Johann P. Solmundsson (Iceland, 1872; died 1935), minister, educator and businessperson. Minister of the First Icelandic Unitarian Society of Winnipeg (1902-03) and the Gimli Unitarian Church (1903-10).

October 3 – Birth of Stephán G. Stephánsson, “the Poet of the Rocky Mountains” (Skagafjörður, 1853). His family emigrated to North America twenty years later and Stephánsson eventually settled in Markerville, Alberta, in 1889, where he lived until his death in 1927. The literary inspiration of the Icelandic Unitarian movement, he organized *Menningarfélagið*, the Icelandic Cultural Society, which was patterned on the Ethical Culture Society of Felix Adler. A prolific writer in the Icelandic language, his poetry was collected in a five-volume anthology called *Andvökur* (*Wakeful Nights*).

October 12 – Birth of Dorothy Livesay (Winnipeg, 1909; died 1996), poet and literary critic, Governor-General’s award winner.

October 20 – (1913) The Canadian Unitarian Conference was established at a sparsely-attended meeting in Winnipeg. Dr. Milton F. Hersey of Montréal was named as its first president, although he does not appear to have been present at the meeting! Horace Westwood was named secretary. The conference was later renamed the Canadian Unitarian Association but, despite much pretension, it did not last for very long.

October 21 – Birth of Philip M. Petursson (Roseau, MN, 1902), minister of All Souls Church/Unitarian Church of Winnipeg, 1929-1943) and the First Federated Church in Winnipeg (1935-64), Regional Director of the American Unitarian Association (1944-61), and Executive Secretary of the Western Canada Unitarian Conference (1961-66). Petursson was a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba (NDP, 1966-77), serving as Minister of Cultural Affairs (1969-71) during the administration of Edward Schreyer.

October 28 – Birth of Charles Francis Potter (Marlboro, MA, 1885), minister of the First Unitarian Church of Edmonton (1914-16) and later a prominent humanist leader in New York City and author of numerous books on religion and society.

October 30 – Birth of Horatio Gates (Massachusetts, 1777; died 1834), entrepreneur. Co-founder and later president of the Bank of Montréal, president of the Bank of Canada, one of the founders and directors of the Montréal General Hospital. Member of the Legislative Council of Lower Canada (1832-33).

November 3 – Birth of Vilhjálmur Stefánsson (Árnes, MB, 1879), Arctic explorer and ethnologist. His family moved to North Dakota when he was still a child and he graduated from university there before entering Harvard Divinity School to study for the Unitarian ministry. He gave up his studies after a year, in favour of a career in anthropology, but he remained an active Unitarian throughout his adult life. Stefánsson was affiliated with the Unitarian Church of All Souls while living in New York City, later the Unitarian Fellowship of Hanover, New Hampshire, and he served on the continental board of directors of the Unitarian Laymen’s League. While generally remembered for his work in the arctic, Stefánsson wrote two volumes of a philosophical nature, *The Standardization of Error* (1927) and *Adventures in Error* (1932).

November 4 – Birth of Benjamin Workman (County Antrim, Ireland, 1794; died 1878), secretary of the Christian Unitarian Society of Montréal. He provoked the first church conflict among Canadian Unitarians (1855-56), seeking to restructure the Montréal church on a presbyterian rather than congregational polity, in an effort to limit the authority of the minister, Rev. John Corder (See January 21). Workman later withdrew from the church.

November 10 – (1880) The First Universalist Parish of Olinda was organized on this day.

November 11 – Birth of H.I.S. (Ingi) Borgford (Winnipeg, 1903), minister of the Church of the Redeemer (Universalist) in Halifax (1937-40) and the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa (1940-). Borgford was the first editor of *The Canadian Unitarian*.

November 15 – Birth of Robert Stanley Weir (Hamilton, 1856; died 1926), judge, poet and musician. Author of the original standard English text of *O Canada*.

November 21 – Birth of Guttormur J. Guttormsson (1878), Icelandic Canadian poet, playwright and religious liberal; author of hymn no. 49 in *Singing the Living Tradition*. Guttormsson was a charter member of the Unitarian Society of Shoal Lake, east of Lundar, Manitoba.

November 21 – Birth of Howard Pawley (Brampton, 1934), Unitarian layperson, Minister of Municipal Affairs (1969-76) and Attorney-General of Manitoba (1973-77), Premier of Manitoba (1981-88).

November 28 – Birth of Lotta Hitschmanova (Prague, 1909), founder of the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada.

December 14 – Birth of Sir Francis Hincks (Ireland, 1807), Unitarian layperson, editor of *The Toronto Examiner*, Prime Minister of the Province of Canada (1851-54), Governor-General of Barbados and the Windward Islands (1855-62), Governor of British Guiana (1862-69), and Minister of Finance (1869-73) in the administration of Sir John A. Macdonald. By the time of his death, Hincks had left Unitarianism for the Anglican Church.

December 28 – Birth of John Molson, Sr. (England, 1763; died 1836), brewer, banker and entrepreneur. Member of the House of Assembly (1816-20) and later Member of the Legislative Council in Lower Canada (1832-36). Founder of the forerunner of Molson Breweries (1786), president of the Bank of Montréal (1826-30), and financier of the Champlain and St. Lawrence Railroad.

DAYS OF HISTORICAL NOTE – INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

January 12 – Birth of Michael Servetus, early Unitarian martyr (1511).

February 3 – Birth of Elizabeth Blackwell (1821)

March 13 – Birth of Joseph Priestley (Fieldhead, England, 1733), Anglo-American Unitarian minister and scientist, credited with the discovery of oxygen.

April 7 – Birth of William Ellery Channing (Newport, 1780), minister of the Federal Street Church in Boston (1803-42) and generally regarded as the father of Unitarianism in North America. In contrast with Hosea Ballou, Channing was opposed to the War of 1812.

April 21 – Birth of James Martineau (1805), prominent British Unitarian minister and author.

April 27 – Birth of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759), feminist pioneer.

April 30 – Birth of Hosea Ballou (1771), early Universalist leader, author of *A Treatise on Atonement*, and advocate of the American invasion of Canada in the War of 1812!

May 5 – William Ellery Channing preached the "Baltimore Sermon" (1819) at the ordination of Jared Sparks, later president of Harvard College.

May 7 – Birth of Rabindranath Tagore (1861), Indian poet and religious liberal.

May 19 – (1841) Theodore Parker preached “The Transient and Permanent in Christianity.”

May 25 – Birth of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Concord, 1803), Transcendentalist philosopher and minister of Second Church in Boston (1829-32).

July 12 – Birth of Henry David Thoreau (July 12), naturalist and essayist.

August 2 – Birth of Sophia Lyon Fahs (China, 1876), preeminent religious educator. Instructor in religious education at Union Theological Seminary (1926-44), curriculum editor for the American Unitarian Association (1937-51), and Unitarian minister (1959-78).

August 24 – Birth of Theodore Parker (Lexington, MA, 1810), prominent Unitarian minister and social reformer.

October 27 – (1553) Michael Servetus burned at Geneva.

November 15 – (1579) Customarily accepted day for the death of Francis Dávid, pioneer Unitarian minister and martyr in Transylvania.

December 5 – Birth of Faustus Socinus (1539), early European Unitarian leader from whom the label “Socinian” is derived.

December 10 – Birth of John Murray (Alton, England, 1741), Anglo-American Universalist leader.