

Ambulatory Luminaries

Did you ever notice that the numerous rooms off the Ambulatory of our church are named after (you might have guessed) various Unitarian or Universalist luminaries? This is the eighth of several articles that will attempt to shine a light on who these Ambulatory Luminaries were and why they merit the honor of being named to these locations.

Margaret Fuller, 1810-1850 (Room 11)

by Toni Gold

Sarah Margaret Fuller Ossoli (May 23, 1810 – July 19, 1850) was an American journalist, editor, critic, translator, and women's rights advocate associated with the American Transcendentalism movement. She was the first American female war correspondent, writing for Horace Greeley's New-York *Tribune*. Her book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is considered the first major feminist work in the United States.

Born Sarah Margaret Fuller in Cambridge, Massachusetts, she was given a substantial early education by her father Timothy Fuller, a Unitarian minister, and later received more formal schooling and became a teacher, giving classes for women meant to compensate for their lack of access to higher education.

Fuller accepted Ralph Waldo Emerson's offer to edit the Transcendentalist journal, *The Dial*, where she was soon recognized as one of the most important figures of the Transcendental movement. By the time she was in her 30s, Fuller had earned a reputation as the best-read person in New England, male or female, and became the first woman allowed to use the library at Harvard College.

In 1846 she was sent to Europe for the *Tribune* where she soon became involved with revolutions in Italy and allied herself with Giuseppe Mazzini. She had a child with Giovanni Ossoli; all three members of the family died in a shipwreck off Fire Island, New York, as they were traveling to the United States in 1850. Fuller's body was never recovered.

Margaret Fuller "possessed more influence on the thought of American women than any woman previous to her time," wrote Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in their 1881 *History of Woman Suffrage*. Author, editor and teacher, Fuller contributed significantly to the American Renaissance in literature and to mid-nineteenth century reform movements. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, published in 1845, profoundly affected the women's rights movement that had its formal beginning at Seneca Falls, New York, three years later.

Shortly after Fuller's death, her importance faded. Her obituary in the newspaper she had once edited, the *Daily Tribune*, said that her works had a few great sentiments, "but as a whole they must commend themselves mainly by their vigor of thought and habitual fearlessness rather than freedom of utterance." In 1995, Fuller was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.
