

Hamilton College Library

“Home Notes”

Communal Societies Collection New Acquisitions

Hamilton College has been honored as the recipient of a highly important piece of communal history. Like a bolt out of the blue, Jean Manson Waite of Bethel, Maine, contacted curator Christian Goodwillie in early July 2015. About four years ago the PBS show *History Detectives*, (Season 8, Episode 11), aired a segment called “Universal Friends.” The show is viewable on their website at:

<http://www.pbs.org/opb/historydetectives/investigation/universal-friends/>

This segment, which begins around seventeen minutes into the program, examines a manuscript legal document pertaining to Publick Universal Friend Jemima Wilkinson’s New York community. Amana Church Society elder Peter Hoehnle brought the episode to Goodwillie’s attention. After viewing the segment Goodwillie tracked down the document’s owners and called them to suggest the Communal Societies Collection of Hamilton College as a repository for this item, which is of extreme value to both early New York and communal history. Lo and behold, four years later Ms. Waite called Goodwillie and explained that after reviewing Hamilton College’s collecting and publication efforts with regard to communal societies she had decided to donate the document to our collection. The call was, of course, reason for great jubilation among the nerdy staff in Special Collections. We are thrilled to present it here in full facsimile and transcription. The document will be conserved to remove old scotch tape applied at the folds. It will then be digitized and made available through the Hamilton College Library Digital Collections portal: <http://elib.hamilton.edu/communal-societies>

Ms. Waite provided an excellent chain of provenance for the document. It was originally in the possession of Lydia Allen Wood, wife of Peleg Wood who was an original member of the Community of Universal Friends. Lydia also donated money to help purchase land that was settled on by the community. Around 1802 the Wood's daughter Martha married Jeremiah Gallet. They were also members of the community. The document traveled with their daughter, Martha E. Gallet, who married Daniel E. Wells. It then descended in subsequent generations of the Wells family, and then the Manson family, until being passed on to Jean Manson Waite in 2001. Ms. Waite was very surprised when she received the document, as there was no knowledge in her family about any connection to Jemima Wilkinson. This mystery was unraveled with the help of the researchers on *History Detectives*.

Ms. Waite determined to donate the item to Hamilton College, stating her "hope ... that this document will aid in research and scholarship and is to be shared." It was given in the name of her father, "Dan Wells Manson and aunt Helen Stewart Manson Fisher, direct descendants of members of the Society of Universal Friends." We sincerely thank Ms. Waite, and all of her ancestors, for their careful preservation of this wonderful document.

Images of the document and a transcription of it follow.

Whereas by an Act of the Legislature of the State of New-York entitled an Act to enable all religious denominations in this State to appoint Trustees, it shall be a Body Corporate for the purpose of taking care of the Temporalities of their respective Congregations, and for other purposes therein mentioned.

And, whereas by said Act, it is enacted that from and after the passing said Act, it shall and may be lawful to and for the male persons of full age belonging to any Church Congregation, or religious Society not already established within this State, or which may at any time hereafter be within the same, to assemble and meet together at the Church Meeting House, or other place where they statedly attend for Divine-Worship. And there, by plurality of voices, to elect, nominate and appoint any number of discreet and prudent persons of their Church Congregation, or Society, not less than three, or exceeding nine in number, as Trustees, to take the Charge of the estate, and property to their respective Churches Congregations, or religious Societies; and to transact all affairs relative to the Temporalities of their respective Churches, Congregations, or Societies.

And, whereas by said Act, it is enacted, that on said Day of election, two of the Elders, or Church Wardens of said Church, Congregation, or Society, shall preside at such Election, receive the votes of the electors, be judges of the qualifications of such electors, and officers; and to return the names of the persons, who, by the plurality of voices, shall be elected Trustees, as aforesaid.

And, whereas by said Act, it is enacted, that, in case there should be no Elders, Church Warden nor Deacons, then it shall be lawful for said Electors to elect by plurality of voices, two members of said Church Congregation, or Society, to hold the said election, and be the returning officers, as aforesaid.

County of Ontario, State of New York,
Jerusalem, seventeenth of the 11th M^o in the Year of
our Lord, One thousand seven hundred and ninety one

We, the subscribers, being of the Church, Congregation, Society
or Community of ^{Universal} Friends, settled on the west side of the One-
-ca Lake, and according to the notice given by Richard Smith
Smith (being a member of said Society) on two succeeding
- Sabbath ^{Evening} ^{meeting} ^{rough} ^{year} ^{days} ^{later} ^{and} ^{one} ^{of}
election, and on said day, being met at the Friends Meeting
House, in said Jerusalem, in compliance with, and in confor-
- mity to a certain law of this State, passed the sixth Day
of the fourth month in the Year of our Lord One thousand seven
- hundred and eighty four: entitled an Act to enable all relig-
- ious denominations within this State, to appoint Trustees
for the purposes therein mentioned.

And, there being no
Elders, Church Wardens, or Deacons, belonging to said Church
Congregation, Society, or Community; and we being (as aforesaid)
(law directs) elected returning officers thereof; and having at
said time and place, duly attended the said business, do hereby
certify that we were then, and there, by plurality of voices,
duly elected returning officers as aforesaid, and that
Richard Smith, Isaac Nichols, Abel Robertsford, Jonathan
Dains, John Briggs, all being and belonging to said
Church, Congregation, Society, or Community, were then, and
there, by plurality of voices, duly elected Trustees, for the pur-
- pose aforesaid, by the male inhabitants of said Congregation
or Community. And that they the said Richard Smith,
Isaac Nichols, Abel Robertsford, Jonathan Dains, John Briggs,
In their said Capacity as Trustees, and their successors forever
hereafter have, hold, and occupy said office and trust, by the
name and title of the Trustees of the Community of Universal
Friends, and in said Capacity to do, act, and transact every matter
and thing, in this State, or any other State, which hath been, or
which may be appropriated to the benefit of said Community
or in any wise appropriate to promote and forward the Divine

Divine and Solemn Worship of God by any of said
Society, or any member of said Community; and every
matter and thing which by law, they for said Capacity
may, or ought to do — —

In Witness Whereof we, the
said Returning Officers, as aforesaid, have hereunto, set
our hands and Seals, in said County, the Day and date
being before written

Jonathan Botiford

Benjamin Brown

George Jenson

Jonathan Botiford

Ordered, that on the third
Day of November in the year one thousand eight
hundred and one came before me Moses Atwater
one of the Judges of the Court of common Pleas
for said County George Jenson who solemnly
affirmed he saw Benjamin Brown and
Jonathan Botiford sign seal and deliver
the foregoing instrument as their free Act
and Deed to be recorded as such

Moses Atwater

Act of Incorporation
of Universal Friends

paid

Ontario Co.

Received for Record 22^o
November 1814 at 12 O'clock
AM and Recorded in Lib:
C of Miscellanies at fol
31^o and examined
Myron Holley etc

Act of Incorporation for Universal Friends Transcription

Whereas by an Act of the Legislature of the State of New-York entitled an Act to enable all religious denominations in this State to appoint Trustees; who shall be a Body Corporate for the purpose of taking care of the Temporalities of their respective Congregations, and for other purposes therein mentioned.

And, whereas by said Act, it is enacted that from and after the passing said Act, it shall and may be lawful to and for the male persons of full age belonging to any Church Congregation, or, religious Society not already established within this State, or which may at any time hereafter be within the same, to assemble and meet together at the Church Meeting-House, or other place where they statedly attend for Divine-Worship. And there, by plurality of voices, to elect, nominate and appoint any number of discreet and prudent persons of their Church Congregation, or Society, not less than three, or exceeding nine in number, as Trustees, to take the Charge of the estate, and property to there respective Churches Congregations, or religious Societies; and to transact all affairs relative to the Temporalities of their respective Churches, Congregations, or Societies.

And, whereas by said act, it is enacted, that on said Day of election, two of the Elders, or Church Wardens of said Church, Congregation, or society shall preside at such Election, receive the votes of the electors; be Judges of the qualifications of such electors, and officers; and to return the names of the persons, who, by the plurality of voices, shall be elected Trustees, as afforesaid.

And, whereas, by said Act, it is enacted, that, in case there should be no Elders, Church Warden nor Deacons, then it shall be lawful for said Electors to elect by plurality of voices, two members of said Church Congregation, or society, to hold the said election, and be the returning officers, as afforesaid. [1]

County of Ontario, State of New York, Jerusalem, seventeenth of the 11th, M^a, in the Year of our Lord, One thousand seven hundred and ninety one. We, the subscribers, being of the Church, Congregation, Society or Community of universal Friends, settled on the west side of the Seneca Lake, and according to the notice given by Richard Smith

Smith (being a member of said Society) on two succeeding Sabbaths [?] meeting [every?] fifteen days [?] said day of election, and on said day, being met at the Friends Meeting-House, in said Jerusalem, in compliance with, and in conformity to a Certain law of this State, passed the sixth Day of the fourth month in the Year our Lord One thousand seven hundred and eighty four: entitled an Act to enable all religious denominations within this State, to appoint Trustees for the purposes therein mentioned.

And, there being no Elders, Church Wardens, or Deacons, belonging to said Church Congregation, Society, or Community; and we being (as said law directs) elected returning officers thereof; and haveing at said time and place, duly attended the said business, do hereby certify that we were then, and there, by a plurality of voices, duly elected returning officers as afforesaid, and that Richard Smith, Isaac Nichols, Abel Botsford, Jonathan Dains, John Briggs, all being and belonging to said Church, Congregation, Society, or Community, were then, and there, by plurality of voices, duly elected Trustees, for the purposes afforesaid, by the male inhabitants of said Congregation or Community. And that they the said Richard Smith, Isaac Nichols, Abel Botsford, Jonathan Dains, John Briggs, In their said Capacity as Trustees, and their successors forever hereafter have, hold, and occupy said office and trust, by the name and title of the Trustees of the Community of Universal Friends, and in said Capassity to do, act, and transact, every matter and thing, in this State, or any other State, which hath been, or which may be appropriated to the benefit of said Community or in any wise appropriated to promote and forward the Divine [2]

Divine and Solemn Worship of God by any of said Society, or any member of said Community; and every matter and thing which by law, they (in said Capacity) may, or ought to do.

In Witness Whereof we, the said Returning Officers, as afforesaid, have hereunto, set our hands and Seals, in said County, the Day and date being before written.

Jonathan Botsford
George Sisson

Benjamin Brown
Jonathan Botsford

Ontario County Be it remembered that on the third Day of November in the year one thousand eight hundred and one came before me Moses

Atwater one of the Judges of the Court of common pleas for said County
George Sisson who Solemnly affirmed he saw Benjamin Brown and
Jonathan Botsford sign seal and deliver the forgoing instrument as their
true Act and Deed—[I allowed &?] Recorded as such—

Moses Atwater [3]

Certificate of the appointment of Trustees of the Community of
Uneversal Friends

Act of Incorporation of Universal Friends paid

Ontario Ss:

Received for Record 22^d November 1814 at 12 o'clock AM and
Recorded in Lib: C of Miscellanies at fol 31 &c: and examined
Myron Holley Clk [4]