

[Conesus, Livingston Co.]

Monies Raised By Parish To Be Only
"Such As Are Voluntarily Subscribed"
Constitution of "The First Universalist Society in the Town of Conesus,"
Organized Over a Century Ago, Reprinted with Comment
By S. Howard Hitchcock

Dear Mr. Editor:

I have received an aged document which brings to life an historical event in the early days of the town of Conesus. That event occurred 100 years ago last fall, and as none of the participants and very few of their descendants are now living I ask space in your paper to reproduce it, for I feel that its centennial should not pass unnoticed.

This was the organization of the Conesus Universalist Parish. I have read very carefully their "constitution," and have been much impressed by the simple, sincere and earnest manner in which those pioneer "Fathers and Mothers in Israel" went about setting up an altar in the defense of their faith. Their "Constitution" follows:

At a meeting of several of the Universalists of the town of Conesus in the county of Livingston, N. Y., convened on the 19th day of December, 1935 [1835], agreeably to previous notice. Br. D. Alger was appointed chairman and J. Huntington, secretary. Whereupon it was resolved that we form ourselves into a society.

Article 1—This society shall be denominated "The First Universalist Society in the Town of Conesus," for the objects hereinafter specified:

It was then unanimously agreed to adopt the following

CONSTITUTION

Article 2—The object of this society shall be the cultivation of Peace and Harmony, and the religion and morality among ourselves and our fellow men.

Article 3—The officers of this society shall consist of a secretary, treasurer, and three trustees to be chosen annually. It shall be the duty of this secretary to keep a faithful record of all the proceedings of the society and all papers belonging to the same and transmit them to his successor in office. It shall be the duty of the treasurer to take charge of all monies belonging to the society and make a faithful exhibition of his accounts with the society at each annual meeting. It shall be the duty of the trustees to transact all business relative to the society and to take charge of the estate belonging to the same.

Article 4—This society shall meet annually for the choice of officers and the transacting of business, on the first Saturday of September of each year; of the place and hour of such meeting the trustees shall give proper notice. Special meetings, however, may be held at any time when a majority of the trustees may deem it necessary. Any person sustaining a good moral

character and uniting in the objects of this society, and wishing to promote the interests of pure religion and uncorrupted Christianity, and desirous of becoming a member, may become such at the discretion of a majority of the trustees by signing this constitution.

Article 5 — No other monies shall be raised by this society but such as are voluntarily subscribed for the objects stated in such subscription, and all such monies shall be at the disposal of the trustees, to be by them appropriated to the objects intended by the contributors.

Article 6—Should any member wish to be dismissed from this Society, to join any other or not, the secretary shall give such member a discharge, and if required, a certificate of said member's standing in this society, and make a record of the same.

Article 7 Any alteration or amendment may hereafter be made in this Constitution, at any annual meeting of the members, providing two-thirds of the members present concur in such alteration or amendment.

DECLARATION

And now, commending ourselves, our families and friends, with our brethren of the human race, to God. our Heavenly Father, who is able to build us up in his most holy faith, guide us by his wisdom in the discharge of every duty both public and private, and to prepare us for the purity and blessedness of His Heavenly Kingdom, we subscribe our names to this Constitution, praying that God. of his infinite Goodness may enable us to abide by the same, to use our influence and exertions to promote the prosperity of this society and conform to its laudable rules and regulations.

Males

Davenport Alger

J. Huntington

Matthew Armstrong

Lewis Clark

Timothy Bailey

Alcyr. Patterson

Daniel Bump

Hosea Gilbert

Iveon Spencer

H. J. Huntington

L. J. Huntington

Joel Gilbert

Ashbel Stephens

C. M. Crego

David Partridge

Females

Sally Armstrong

Dilte Briggs

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Emily L. Armstrong
Sally Clark
Mrs. M. A. Morris

The above-named appear to have been the charter members. But either something had been forgotten or an unexpected emergency arose, out of which grew Article 8, followed during several years by the following signatures:

Article 8—Any person walking disorderly and contrary to the objects stated in this Constitution, and who, having been admonished and reprovved according to the rules laid down in the New Testament, still persists in his evil practice, may have his name erased from the records of said society by a vote of two-thirds of the members present.

Later Members—No Date of Membership

Russell Taylor
Abiel Stephens
Frederick Baker
Robert Patterson
George F. Coe
Solomon Hitchcock
D. A. Morris
Sylvester Morris, Jr.
S. N. Thorp
John Magee
Wm. K. Clark
O. W. Morris
T. F. DeGraw
Laura N. Hitchcock
Lucina B. Annis
Mary E. Morris
Mary J. Alger
Electa A. Cole
Sarah DeGraw
Sarah J. Clark
Alanson B. Annis
John D. Alger
J. M. Alger
L. Snyder
Elias Bearss

The date fixed for the annual meeting as prescribed in Article 4 was changed to "The last Saturday in March." as shown by a note in the margin. There is no record that any changes were made in the original membership except that the name of Daniel Bump was erased from the list. It is probable that his wish to leave the organization gave rise to Article 6.

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While not wholly wanting, women are in a minority—Probably they were not so willing to openly unite with public movements as they became later.

Since Article 5 provides that: "No other monies shall be raised by this society except what shall be voluntarily subscribed," it would seem that the customs which later became common, such as church suppers, Ladies' Aid work, Dramatic Benefit performances etc. were sternly frowned upon by these early religious workers. But subscriptions must have been fairly numerous, for a church was built at Crockett's Corners on land donated for that purpose by the late Timothy DeGraw, Sr., who for many years owned and occupied the farm now owned by Harold Hunt and family. The first minister was the Rev Orrin Roberts, an aged man who performed the marriage ceremony for my father and mother in 1842. This church continued to be a Mecca for Universalists until it was replaced by another church, built at Conesus Center in 1876. Pastors of the old church within the memory of the writer were the Revs. J. R. Sage, L.[Lewis] C. Browne, Stephen Crane, Ira Lovejoy, John R. Dobson, and last of all W. B. Randolph. The church at Conesus Center was burned about three years ago and was replaced by the present Community church.

It will be noted that this organization of 100 years ago was a society and not a church. It was a Parish, wholly apart from the Ecclesiastical body made up of church members. But where is there today a church, however wealthy or prosperous, which is founded on such a splendid set of moral principles as this whose centennial has recently passed. Our forefathers builded well in their community. They lived when religion was a more real and active force than it has been of late. They built for themselves an altar. They worshipped there and one by one they passed from the scene. And now. as Will Carleton says: Sleep well, old Pioneer.

The original set of by-laws, brown and very dim with age, remained in the Alger homestead in Conesus so long as any of that family continued to occupy it. After the death of James A. Alger, the last to live there, this aged document was cared for by Mr. and Mrs. John R. Alger of Conesus Center, who furnished it to the writer for his examination and this article.

S. Howard Hitchcock

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Transcribed on 4 Oct 2009 by Karen E. Dau of Rochester, NY