

**DISCOURSE BEFORE THE RHODE
ISLAND SOCIETY AT ITS
CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF
RHODE ISLAND'S ADOPTION OF
THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION**

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Discourse before the Rhode Island society at its centennial celebration of Rhode Island's adoption of the federal constitution by Horatio Rogers

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HORATIO ROGERS

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DISCOURSE
BEFORE THE
Rhode Island Historical Society
AT ITS CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF
RHODE ISLAND'S ADOPTION
OF THE
FEDERAL CONSTITUTION,

IN PROVIDENCE, R. I., MAY 29, 1890.

BY
HORATIO ROGERS,
PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIETY.

TOGETHER WITH OTHER PROCEEDINGS ON
THAT OCCASION.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

The Providence Press:
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37 Custom House Street.
1890.

At the Quarterly Meeting of the Rhode Island Historical Society, held July 1, 1890, the thanks of the Society were tendered to the President of Brown University for the use of Sayles Memorial Hall; to Professor B. W. Hood and the High School Choir for their fine music; to the Orator for his eloquent and scholarly discourse; and to all other participants in the Centennial Celebration, by the Society, of Rhode Island's Adoption of the Federal Constitution, for their able and satisfactory services; and it was voted that one thousand copies of the discourse and the other proceedings be printed for the use of the Society.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION
OF
RHODE ISLAND'S ADOPTION
OF THE
FEDERAL CONSTITUTION.

At the Quarterly Meeting of the Rhode Island Historical Society held April 2, 1889, Messrs. William D. Ely and John A. Howland and Rev. W. F. B. Jackson were appointed a committee to make arrangements for a suitable celebration by the Society of Rhode Island's Adoption of the Federal Constitution, May 29, 1890. Upon the death of Mr. Howland, the Rev. Dr. E. Benjamin Andrews was appointed to fill the vacancy, and the committee subsequently reported the following order of commemorative proceedings to be holden in Sayles Memorial Hall, at 7½ o'clock P. M.

The Hon. George M. Carpenter, First Vice-President of the Society, and United States District Judge for the District of Rhode Island, to preside.

Singing of patriotic songs by a choir of pupils from the Providence High School, under the direction of Professor B. W. Hood.

Prayer by the Rev. Dr. E. Benjamin Andrews, Second Vice-President of the Society, and President of Brown University.

Discourse by General Horatio Rogers, President of the Society.

Benediction by the Rev. Dr. Andrews.

"America," by the choir.

At the time and place appointed "there was," in the words of the *Providence Journal*, "a large and notable gathering," and the prescribed programme was successfully carried out. A half-hour of song by the choir was succeeded by the following

PRAYER BY THE REV. DR. E. BENJAMIN ANDREWS.

Eternal Spirit, the Creator of Man and the Ordainer of History, we would reverently recognize Thee as we meet this evening to set up a memorial pillar upon the great highway of time. We thank Thee for the marvellous career of the Commonwealth in which we dwell. We believe it to have been of Thy divine counsel and goodness that here upon these beautiful shores, from the first, and earlier than at any other spot upon our planet, men were permitted to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences; and that the lively experiment was here put forth in faith of erecting a constitution of government to have validity only in civil things. Almighty God, it is because this tree of religious liberty was planted by Thy own right hand that it did not wither and die, but rather sent out noble branches graciously to beshadow all the States of our beloved land; yea, and even yielded fruit for the life of the other nations of the earth. Forgive us, O Righteous Judge, if some pride should mingle with our thanksgiving, as we reflect that the one clear and unchallenged contribution which America has made to the

civilization of mankind has proceeded from the favored community to which we belong.

O God, our fathers were not always wise. They could not on all occasions see the right way or read the signs of their times. They could not perfectly make out the future. May we, and may all men, judge them with circumspection and with charity. They were conscientious; and we bless Thee that Thou didst lead them better than they knew, at last to cast in their lot with the great sisterhood of States in company with whom they had fought out their liberties.

Bestow abundance of Thy Spirit upon Thy servant who shall at this time array before our thoughts the events of that critical period; so that from his words all present may take deeper reverence for the past and firmer hope regarding the future. May we learn to trust in principles, even when they are new and unpopular; knowing that as the world is ruled by the God of truth, they who are of the truth and of the light shall assuredly triumph in the end. Bless the Nation of which, happily, we now form part. Bless our State. Be with its civil officers from highest to lowest, and with all its people. May righteousness, public spirit, and lofty ideas and ideals so prevail among us that when in another hundred years men gather, as we now gather, to review the past, we may not seem altogether unworthy to be thought of along with the mighty departed whom we delight to honor. Amen!

The Hon. George M. Carpenter, who presided, introduced the Orator of the occasion in these words:

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: It is to commemorate the accession of the State of Rhode Island to the National Government that we have invited your presence this even-

ing, — an event of the greatest import to our own people, and not without consequence to the Nation. I say, advisedly, the accession of our State; because the adoption of the Constitution by our State was not only later in point of time but different in character from the action of most of the original States. We joined ourselves to a Nation already established and in the full exercise of governmental power, and in so doing we yielded our existence as an independent and sovereign State. Fully appreciating the character and the consequences of this action, we chose a time later than that which seemed convenient to other States. Having made ourselves part of the new Nation, we may say, without presumption, that we have not failed in our allegiance and that we have not been wanting to the Nation in council or in the field of battle. But we think it becoming that, on this anniversary, and under the direction of this Society, there should be made a definitive and authoritative statement of the reasons which impelled us first to hesitate with anxious deliberation, and afterwards freely and fully to abandon our independent character and become an integral part of an indissoluble Nation. This declaration should be made in such form that it shall be the end of controversy, and that the future student of history may require no further material for a just and discriminating conclusion. For the delivery of such a statement I now have the honor to present the President of the Society, General Horatio Rogers.

GENERAL ROGERS'S DISCOURSE.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN : We have met to celebrate a great event in the history of Rhode Island. On this centennial anniversary of her adoption of the federal constitution I shall endeavor to trace the causes of her delay in ratifying that instrument, for she was the last of the original thirteen states to avail herself of its provisions, and she has been bitterly assailed for not more speedily parting with that independent sovereignty which some of her more rapid sister states have since spent four years in bloody warfare in seeking to regain.

Rhode Island, to borrow the language of her General Assembly, in 1845, when resenting the interference of the Legislature of Maine in matters growing out of the Dorr War, so called, "can never . . . forget her past history—her early struggles in the cause of religious freedom—her toils, and sufferings, and sacrifices, in the War of the Revolution, and her jealous determination, at all times, to secure to the people of Rhode Island the exclusive right to manage their own affairs in their own way."¹

These words of her official representatives afford the key to Rhode Island's action on more than one occasion, and, broadly speaking, furnish the explanation of her conduct in regard to the federal constitution.

¹ Proceedings in the Rhode Island Legislature on Sundry Resolutions of the State of Maine, 5; also R. I. Acts and Resolves, June Session, 1845, p. 49.