

**MINUTES OF THE WESTERN
CONGREGATIONAL
CONVENTION: HELD IN
MICHIGAN CITY, INDIANA, JULY
30 - AUGUST 3, 1846**

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VARIOUS

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MINUTES

76

OF THE

WESTERN

Congregational Convention,

HELD IN

MICHIGAN CITY, INDIANA,

JULY 30—AUGUST 3, 1846.

WITH AN

INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY ONE OF THE SECRETARIES

AND AN APPENDIX.



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INTRODUCTORY.

The immediate and remote results of the Michigan City Convention, were such as to entitle its proceedings to publication in a more accessible and permanent form, than they have received. In undertaking the present issue, it has seemed desirable for the sake of readers who are scarcely aware that such a Convention was ever held, to furnish an introductory statement showing briefly what general reasons seemed to warrant its call, and what was the particular occasion of its assembling.

The division of the Presbyterian church had produced two bodies sustaining towards each other the relation of rivals. One of these—the New School body, was however, much the weaker, both in numbers and resources. As was natural, there was soon developed among them a large measure of the *esprit de corps*, and it soon appeared to some of them—particularly at the West, that a rapid and substantial growth would be secured, if the Congregational churches of that region, and the valuable Congregational element rapidly coming in from New England and New York, could be absorbed, and the formation of other such churches prevented,—except as they should be willing to connect themselves with the Presbyteries.

Accordingly the framers of the Plan of Union of 1801, were much praised for their catholicity and wisdom, and the Plan itself was warmly commended to Congregational churches as a happy measure for unity and strength. Congregational ministers entering the West, were urged to connect themselves with Presbyteries. They were referred to the example of numbers who had done so; were assured that Congregationalism as a government was not strong enough for the western people; that the West was really Presbyterian ground; that there was no certainty of obtaining aid from the Home Missionary Society, except through the Presbyterian channel; and that all attempts to organize and promote “distinctive Congregationalism”—as some of them were accustomed to phrase it—would be looked upon and treated as sectarian and schismatic.

The New School Assembly had adopted the plan of holding only triennial meetings. This afforded an opportunity for the employ-

ment of another means for the extinguishment of the kindling interest in Congregationalism. A series of conventions was arranged and held in prominent cities of the West, occurring in those years when the Assembly did not meet. They were called "Presbyterian and Congregational." Congregationalists were carefully invited, and in many instances urged to attend; but in each convention, they were a small minority. The meetings were large and interesting, comprising many of the leading New School ministers of the West. While of course, there was nothing in the language of the call convening these Conventions that would indicate any design against the Congregational polity, and while many of the Presbyterians attending them, had no such design, yet there were others—not a few—men of position and influence—men whose words gave shape and tone and spirit to the meetings, whose purpose in this respect, was at length, fortunately, only too apparent.

One of these Conventions was held at Detroit, Michigan, in June, 1845. The writer of this was a member, and was chosen one of its Secretaries. The meeting was large, and in its membership and spirit, essentially Presbyterian. Many of the Congregationalists present, were young men, inexperienced and but imperfectly acquainted with one another; and when they perceived that the remarks occasionally dropped unduly exalting the Presbyterian polity, or disparaging their own, were but indications of the main current of feeling in the Convention, they seriously felt the disadvantage of their position. But when at length, they found a considerable part of one afternoon occupied with speeches from Doctors of Divinity, Theological Professors, and others of the ablest and most eminent men in the Convention,—setting forth their opinion that Presbyterianism Congregationalized, and Congregationalism Presbyterianized, made the best ecclesiastical polity for the West, and not obscurely intimating that just about that was afforded by the New School body;—when they heard these men bestowing lavish compliments on New England institutions,—glorying in having been born and educated among the Congregational churches, and then glorying a little more, in having abandoned them for the Presbyterian connection,—thus giving the fact of their own example in favor of such a course;—when they heard these men claiming that they were still true representatives of the churches which they had forsaken, and more than hinting that those Congregationalists who refused to unite with a Presbytery, and persisted in efforts to promote "dis-

tinctive Congregationalism,"—that is, *real* Congregationalism, were doing great mischief, and deserved no stinted censure;—when they heard these things, they were filled with sadness: and if some of them were dispirited, it is certain that most of them were filled with a firmer purpose to resist this scheme of absorption, and to do all they honorably could, to maintain and advance in the West, the polity of the Pilgrims.

Rev. Parsons Cooke, one of the editors of *The New England Puritan*, was present, and an attentive observer of all that was passing. Near the close of the speeches just referred to, he came to the table where the writer was employed and enquired,—“Have you given attention to the remarks just made? What do you think of them?” It was replied,—“Yes, I have heard them with much sorrow, and fear for their mischievous tendency.” He asked, “What can be done to counteract this?” It was answered, “We must have a Convention of our own; let us confer about it after the adjournment.”

A recess was presently taken, most of which was spent in conversation upon this subject. We were agreed in the opinion that the Congregationalists of the West, ought to meet and confer together fully on all matters affecting their increase and prosperity as churches. Two or three other ministers who were consulted, concurred in this view,—and before the conversation closed, the writer suggested that the General Association of Michigan would be the proper body to call the proposed Convention, and he engaged to submit the matter for their action at the next meeting.

Accordingly at the meeting of the Association held in Detroit, on the 30th of September, 1845, the subject was fully laid before the body, and resulted in their unanimous adoption of a resolution approving the proposal, and in the appointment of a committee with instructions to determine the time and place, and to issue a call for a Congregational Convention, to be held the ensuing summer.

The following is a copy of the call issued by the Committee:—

Western Congregational Convention.

It was resolved by the General Association of Michigan at their last annual meeting, to call a Convention of Congregationalists to be held the present year,—for mutual consultation on the condition, prospects, and wants of the Congregational churches of the West; the advancement of the various enterprises of Christian benevolence and philanthropy; and for the promotion of true religion generally.

The undersigned were appointed a committee to fix upon the time

and place, and issue the call for such Convention ; and they would now announce that they have agreed upon Thursday the 30th of July next, as the proper time,—and Michigan City, Indiana, as the proper place for holding the Convention.

The Committee do therefore, in behalf of the body by whom they were appointed, and in accordance with their instructions, most cordially invite the orthodox Congregational ministers in our country and the adjoining provinces, who are members in regular standing in the Associations within the bounds of which they reside,—and also one delegate duly chosen for that purpose, from every orthodox Congregational church,—to attend the aforesaid *Convention, to be held in Michigan City, Indiana, commencing at 11 o'clock, A. M., on Thursday, the 30th of July next.*

The Congregational church of Michigan City, with their pastor, Rev. Erastus Colton, have desired the Committee to assure the ministers and delegates to the Convention of their earnest wish to greet them, and extend to them their hospitalities.

Michigan City is situated on Lake Michigan, forty miles from Chicago, and thirty miles from St. Joseph ; from which places it will be accessible daily, by steamboat. Persons from the East may take the route of the upper lakes to Chicago, or from Detroit across the peninsula, by the Central Railroad and stage-coach to St. Joseph ; or from Monroe or Toledo, by the Southern Railroad and stage-coach, direct to Michigan City.

I. SMITH HOBART, }
 CHESTER HAMMOND, } *Committee.*
 O. C. THOMPSON, }

Union City, April 23, 1846.

MINUTES.

In response to the preceding invitation, the Convention assembled at the time and place named, and was called to order by Rev. L. Smith Hobart, Chairman of the Committee.

Rev. Erastus Colton, minister of the church in Michigan city, was chosen Chairman for the purpose of organization, and Rev. L. Smith Hobart, Clerk.

Prayer was offered by the Chairman.

On motion, Rev. Messrs. O. C. Thompson and J. B. Walker, and Dr. J. D. Weston, were appointed a committee to prepare a Roll of members.

Rev. Messrs. Pierce, Langworthy, and Pearson, were appointed a committee to nominate officers for the Convention.

An adjournment was then taken till 2 o'clock, P. M.

THURSDAY AFTERNOON.

The Convention assembled according to adjournment, and spent an hour in devotional exercises.

Rev. O. C. Thompson presented the report of the Committee to prepare the Roll, which was accepted and is as follows:—

IOWA.—Rev. Julius A. Reed, *Davenport*; Rev. Charles Burnham, *Brighton*; Rev. Alden B. Robbins, *Bloomington*.

WISCONSIN.—Rev. John J. Miter, Dr. J. D. Weston, *Milwaukee*.

MICHIGAN.—Rev. L. Smith Hobart, Thomas L. Acker, Esq., *Union City*; Rev. John D. Pierce, *Marshall*; Rev. John J. Bliss, *Litchfield*; Rev. G. L. Foster, Joseph E. Beebe, Esq., *Jackson*; Rev. George Barnum, *Leoni*; Rev. Thomas Jones, *Grass Lake*; Rev. Clark Lockwood, *Clinton*; Rev. E. H. Rice, *Lenawee*; Rev. H. L. Hammond, Hon. C. G. Hammond, *Detroit*; Rev. Orlo D. Hine, *Pontiac*; Rev. Orson Parker, *Flint*; Rev. O. C. Thompson, *St. Clair*.

ILLINOIS.—Rev. Jonathan Blanchard, *Galesburg*; Rev. N. C. Clark, W. R. Mann, Esq., *Elgin*; Rev. R. M. Pearson, *Grand Du*

Tour; Rev. H. Brown, Eli Northum, Esq., *Naperville*; Rev. E. C. Birge, *Endor*; Rev. E. G. Howe, *Woodstock*; Rev. Joel Grant, *Lockport*; Rev. William Kirby, *Jacksonville*; Rev. James B. Walker, John Brooks, Esq., *Chicago*.

INDIANA.—Rev. Erastus Colton, Dea. E. Folsom, *Michigan City*; Rev. M. A. Jewett, L. H. Scott, Esq., *Terre Haute*; Rev. D. M. Bardwell, *Ontario*.

OHIO.—Rev. George Roberts, *Andover*; Rev. Thomas Tenney, *Austinburg*.

NEW YORK.—Rev. Pindar Field, *Oriskany Falls*; David Hale, Esq., *New York City*; Rev. Robert Laird, *Fowlerville*; Rev. Sydney Brown, *Cohocton*.

CONNECTICUT.—Rev. Charles S. Sherman, *New Britain*.

MASSACHUSETTS.—Rev. Parsons Cooke, *Lynn*; Rev. Isaac P. Langworthy, *Chelsea*.

CANADA.—Rev. James Nall, *Port Sarnia*; Rev. William Clarke, *Simcoe*.

Rev. J. D. Pierce of the Committee to nominate officers, presented their report, which was adopted, as follows:—

Rev. JOHN J. MITER, President.

Rev. I. P. LANGWORTHY, }
Rev. J. BLANCHARD, } Vice-Presidents.

Rev. L. SMITH HOBART, }
Hon. CHARLES G. HAMMOND, } Secretaries.

The following persons were appointed a committee to lay before the Convention such subjects for consideration as they should judge appropriate and within the terms of the call:—Rev. Messrs. Cooke, N. C. Clark, W. Clarke, Hammond, Burnham, Roberts, Laird, Dr. Weston, and Dea. Folsom.

Rev. Messrs. Colton, Kirby, Thompson, and Dea. Folsom were appointed a committee to arrange the Religious Exercises of the Convention.

Letters were read from Rev. Levi L. Fay and Prof. Henry N. Day of Ohio, and from Rev. J. Tassej of Pennsylvania, expressing their interest in the objects of the Convention, and regrets at their inability to be present.

The Committee on Religious Exercises reported in part, recommending that the first half hour of each morning and afternoon session be spent in devotional exercises, and that a sermon be