

**SEMI-CENTENNIAL OF  
YORK COUNTY  
CONFERENCE, BUXTON,  
MAINE, JUNE 4 AND 5, 1872**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649466962

Semi-Centennial of York County Conference, Buxton, Maine, June 4 and 5, 1872 by J. D. Emerson & B. P. Snow

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Cover @ 2017

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**J. D. EMERSON & B. P. SNOW**

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YORK COUNTY  
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SEMI-CENTENNIAL

*Congregational* OF *Churches*,  
*Maine*, —  
YORK COUNTY CONFERENCE,

BUXTON, MAINE,

JUNE 4 AND 5, 1872.

PAPERS THERE READ, AND SKETCHES OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES  
IN THE COUNTY, WITH NOTES APPENDED DOWN TO THE PRESENT  
TIME, JUNE, 1876.

*J. D.*  
J. D. EMERSON AND B. P. SNOW,

*Committee of Publication.*

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PORTLAND:  
HOYT, FOGG & DONHAM.  
1876.

## YORK CONFERENCE.

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THE Semi-centennial Anniversary and Jubilee commemoration of the organization of the Conference, was held June 4, 1872, at Buxton Center, where it was formed. Rev. Silvanus Hayward presided, and Mrs. Ellen W. Bacon wrote an original hymn for the occasion,

"Into this holy place our fathers reverent came."

Early, on a delightful day, an unusually large number of the friends and former members of conference, some of whom now reside out of the state, assembled at the church. Rev. Thomas N. Lord, of Limerick, preached the historical sermon; Hon. Joseph Titcomb, Revs. Cole and Emerson, read the papers herein published. Nearly all the churches were represented, two only being without pastors. The evening was devoted to reminiscences of deceased members, lay and clerical. The arrangements of pastor Bixby were complete, the singing choice, and the hospitality of his people cordial and ample.

### ABSTRACT OF MR. LORD'S SERMON.

Text, Ps. cvii. 43, "Whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord."

Theme: God's love for his people as proved by his providential dealings toward them. This is only realized by careful observation. This observation is wise, because

of the influence it exerts to prevent despondency, incite to duty, and furnish comfort in trial.

"Fifty years ago, next October, several of our dear, departed brethren met here and organized this body. The meek and saintly Charles Freeman was then in his ministerial youth; Dr. Coffin, from a pastorate of almost sixty years, passed away the previous year; Levi Loring, decided, straight-forward, had just entered upon his work here; the scholarly Jonathan Cogswell, distinguished as a theologian and professor; the last two and the first are the only ministers of the county, mentioned as present at the formation of the conference. Doubtless others were, especially Pomroy of Gorham, and Mead of Brunswick, who, in December following, were efficient in forming Cumberland Conference.

Certain facts are interesting; at the birth of this conference the members of churches numbered 600; in 1830, they were 1,216; in 1833, 2,014; in years 1831 and 1832, over 500 were added; in 1871, the membership was 2,308. In 1833, in Maine, were 182 churches and 12,370 communicants; in 1871, 242 churches, and 19,704 communicants. Already we have celebrated three semi-centennials of Bowdoin College, Bangor Seminary, and Maine Missionary Society. How many Puritan notions were derided, which are now popular with all sects. Within fifty years every church has built a meeting-house, at a total cost of \$100,000. This little body has increased to a mighty family, westward and southward, and their influence in the future, who can tell? Let us thank God for the past, and take his loving-kindness to these churches as the pledge, he will not forsake them in the future."

ORIGIN OF THE YORK COUNTY CONFERENCE AND THE  
CONFERENCE SYSTEM NOW OBTAINING.

BY REV. ALBERT COLE.

SOME fourteen years ago the York County Conference appointed a committee, of which the writer of this paper was a member, to investigate the history of the origin of this conference, and of our conference system, and report thereafter. The committee were fortunately in possession of some valuable manuscripts of the late learned and excellent Rev. Charles Freeman, of Limerick, who bore an important part in the formation of this conference, and was one of its chief members and sustainers, and likewise an ornament to it, during his long and beneficial pastorate. In these manuscripts we find a plain account of the formation of the conference in this county, which was the beginning of such organizations in our denomination. The incipient steps to its formation were taken at a ministerial association at Alfred, in August, 1822.

But there arose a question not answered in Mr. Freeman's account; a question which gave rise to a sharp controversy in the newspapers many years ago, as we learn from a correspondence between Rev. Messrs. Freeman and Douglass, in 1842, kindly communicated to us by the latter some ten years since. The question was, *Who first suggested the formation of the conference?*

There were then living in this State two venerable men, fathers in Israel and in the ministry, who were present at the incipient and the completing steps of the formation of the first-born of conferences, Rev. Levi Loring, then at Athens, and Rev. Joseph P. Fessenden, then at South



Bridgton. These honored brethren were written to on the subject, and promptly responded. Mr. Loring wrote, that the Rev. Nathan Douglass, just mentioned, with whom the association met at Alfred, in walking from his dwelling to the place of the public meeting, in company with Mr. Loring and some one else, suggested the idea of a gathering of the ministers and lay delegates of the churches, so as to arouse the people, and advance the interests of religion in the county. And after the return from the public service, the subject was discussed in the association, and the *County Conference* was the result.

Mr. Fessenden, dictating his response, for he was too feeble to write, ascribed the originating of the idea of the conference to the fertile mind of Mr. Freeman.

There was a way to harmonize these conflicting witnesses. Mr. Loring remembered the private walk to the public lecture, and the suggestion. And Mr. Fessenden remembered the discussion in the association, where Mr. Freeman, the standing scribe, would naturally be the one to reduce the proposition to writing, and present it for formal action. Or it is within the range of possibility for the thought to have arisen simultaneously in two minds, and to have been suggested in two little companies of the brethren, as they were going to the lecture or returning from it, and for each of these two witnesses to remember the suggestion as he heard it; for both these venerable men were very positive.

Both these servants of God passed away soon after writing in relation to this matter. But Mr. Douglass still remained, and could probably settle the question. But, where was he? We could not learn, and so we waited. A kind Providence soon brought him forward, and we learned from his lips and from the correspondence between him

and Mr. Freeman, of 1852, that the answer of Mr. Loring was correct,—that the suggestion came from Mr. Douglass during the walk to the public lecture. The matter was talked over in the association after the return, where it took due form, and in proper time the conference was ushered into life.

From the just named correspondence we learned another fact pertinent to our subject. The Rev. George Payson, of Kennebunkport, then present, was deeply interested in the idea, and was for carrying it further than proposed, so as to have a conference in each county in the State, and then to have the several County Conferences combined together in some form. He stated his views, but the objection naturally arose in some minds, that in such a combination the individual churches would be in danger of losing their independence. In this desire of Mr. Payson and others, originated afterward the State Conference; and to obviate the danger implied in the objection, the eighth article of the constitution of that body was inserted, which provides that "The several County Conferences shall retain their individual rights and privileges, and no ecclesiastical power or authority shall ever be assumed by the General Conference, or be delegated to it."

We will now give extracts from Mr. Freeman's account:

The first movement to establish the conference system was made in the York County Association of Ministers, at a meeting held in Alfred, August 6, 1822. There were present at this meeting, Rev. Jonathan Calef, of Lyman, Rev. Joseph Hilliard, of Berwick, Rev. Jonathan Cogswell, of Saco, Rev. George Payson, of Kennebunkport, then of Limerick, Rev. Levi Loring, of Buxton, Rev. Joseph P. Fessenden, of Kennebunkport, Mr. Phineas Pratt, of Saco, and Charles Freeman, of Limerick. Rev. Jonathan Calef officiated as Moderator, and Charles Freeman as Standing Scribe.

Two things are noteworthy in this extract. First, that the well-known modesty of Mr. Freeman prevented his

putting the usual *Rev.* before his own name; and this, as some of us remember, was habitual with him. Secondly, by mistake he left out the name of Rev. Nathan Douglass, of Alfred, with whom the association was holding its meeting. In the forementioned correspondence of 1842, he writes Mr. Douglass an extract from the records of that meeting, to show that the Rev. Mr. Greenleaf, of Wells, was not there, bearing on a point raised in the correspondence. And in that extract he mentions the eight persons above named as present, and also Mr. Douglass, at whose house the meeting was held.

The account proceeds :

At this meeting it was voted that on the first Tuesday in October, this association hold an annual meeting.

It was voted that at the annual meeting of the association all ordinary business be suspended.

*Voted,* That the churches in connection with the members of the York County Association of ministers, be invited to appoint one delegate to unite with their pastor in attending the annual meeting, to be held in future on the first Tuesday of October annually; and also that the destitute Congregational churches in this county be invited to unite with us, by appointing two delegates.

*Voted,* That a committee of three be appointed to prepare business for the yearly associational meeting.

*Voted,* That Bros. Payson, Freeman, and Fessenden, be the committee.

*Voted,* That the members of this association lay this business before their churches.

*Voted,* That the scribe inform the destitute churches of this yearly association, and invite them to send delegates.

*Voted,* That each member of this association prepare an account of the state of his church for the yearly meeting.

*Voted,* That the scribe request the destitute churches to give by their delegates an account of the state of their churches.

*Voted,* That the object of this yearly meeting be to promote the union and prosperity of the churches of this county.

*Voted,* That at the annual meeting a collection be solicited, to aid the destitute churches in this county.