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 intitled an Act to enable all religious denominations in the State to appropria
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 was declared that if
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 themselves together at the Church Meeting House, or other place where they shall be lawfully allowed for Divine Worship. And there, by plurality of votes, to elect, nominate, and appoint any number of persons to manage justice of the Church Congregation or Society, not less than three, nor exceeding five in number, and to take the charge of the estate and property to their respective Churches or Congregations, or Religious Societies, and to transact all affairs relating 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 of each Church Congregation or Society shall reside 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 votes, shall be elected, pastors, as aforesaid.

And whereas by one Act, it is enacted, that in case there should be no Elders in the Church where no Elders, then it shall be lawful for said Electors to elect by plurality of votes, 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, twelfth of the 11th. M., 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 Friends, settled on the west side of the Am

can Lake, and according to the notices given by Richard Smith (being a member of said Society) on two ensuing

two. A meeting was appointed for the 8th day of the 6th

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 of our Lord One thousand seven hundred and eighty-four entitled an Act, to enable all religi

ous 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)

to return a list of said Trustees, and having at said time and place, only attended the said business, do hereby

in full authority that we were there, and there, by plurality of voices, duly elected returning officers as aforesaid, and that

Richard Smith, Isaac Nichols, Abel Balfour, Jonathan Dains, John Briggs, all being and belonging to said

Church, Congregation, Society, or Community, were there, 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 Balfour, 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 in any other State, which both be, or

which may be appropriated to the benefit of said Community

or in any wise appropriate to promote and forward the same.
Divine and Solemn Transaction 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 aforesaid, have hereunto set our hands and Seals, in said County, the Day and date being here written.

Jonathan Boulter
Benjamin Brown

George Luson
Cornelius Budor

[Signature]

Ten years of the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty-six in the month of January in the said County of New York in the State of New York, to wit, the day of November in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty-six, and one came before the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York, who approved said election, and in the name of the City of New York, gave to the said Benjamin Brown, in a certain place, to wit, New York City, the said instrument, as the same is subscribed and sealed, and in the name of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New York as such.

Name of Electorate
Act of Incorporation of Universal Friends

Ontario Co:

Received for Record 22nd November 1814 at 12 O’clock AM and recorded in Lib: Co of Miscellanea at fol 314: and examined

Myron Hooley Clark
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 Carey, 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 having 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 aforesaid, 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 aforesaid, 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 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 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 aforesaid, 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 22d November 1814 at 12 o’clock AM and
Recorded in Lib: C of Miscellanies at fol 31 &c: and examined
Myron Holley Clk [4]