

**Minutes of the Annual
North Carolina
(Bethel) Conference**



1830



**Transcribed for the
Free Will Baptist
Historical Collection
By Robert E. Picirilli**

Minutes of the Annual N.C. (Bethel) Conference, 1830

Editorial Note: The following material in regular typeface is transcribed from *History of the Free Will Baptists of North Carolina* by Harrison and Barfield. *The Morning Star*, March 9, 1831, makes reference to having received the minutes for 1830, and a very brief summary is given. Only one paragraph is quoted there from the original minutes, and it appears below in italic typeface. A one-sentence statement about statistics also appears in this summary that probably was not contained in the minutes, as such, but gathered from a statistical table that accompanied the minutes. (It may be the Annual FWB Conference did not use the name “Bethel” until the following year when it began to meet as two separate conferences.)

Conference in 1830 was held at Grimsley church, Green Co, N. C., on the 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th days of Nov. Eld. Howel Hearn delivered the Introductory sermon, from Heb. 13:1,—“Let brotherly love continue.” After which, the Conference organized and proceeded to business. Eld. Howell Hearn, Moderator, and Thomas Hood, Clerk.

On motion, Emanuel Jorman, and Jesse Vause were appointed a Committee of finance to receive contributions, settle with the Treasurer, and report to Conference.

On motion, the letters from the several churches were handed in, and read. Elds. Hays and Clifton, messengers from the Christian Conference, held at Salem Church, Johnson Co., N. C., attended this meeting, and were received with pleasure.

On motion, Elds. Hearn, Heath, Bond, and Vause were appointed messengers to the next.

Christian Conference, to be held at Pleasant Spring church, Wake Co., N. C., to begin on Friday before the first Lord’s day in October next.

On motion, by Eld. Heath, the Conference agree that a division be made in the Annual Conference, on account of convenience.

Voted, that Elds. H. Smith, J. Heath, J. Alfin, B. Hollace, N. Lockhart, W. Latham, and William Isler, be appointed a committee to divide the Conference, and that the division be made by churches and not by line.

Reported by the above named Committee, that the Eastern division be composed of the following churches, viz:—Newbern, Spring Creek, Little Swift Creek, Bay River, Brice's Creek, Goose Creek, and Piney Neck, Craven County; Pungo, Concord, North Creek and Beaver Dam, Beaufort County; Welche's Creek, Martin Co.; and Clay Root, Pitt Co;—thirteen in all.. And that the Western division be composed of all the churches belonging to the connection, both in North and South Carolina, except those mentioned in the Eastern division.

Voted, that for distinction, the Eastern division shall be called the Shiloh Conference, and the Western division Bethel Conference.

Voted, that the contributions made this year by the churches belonging to the Shiloh Conference, be paid over to Thomas J. Latham, their appointed Treasurer.

Voted, that the first Shiloh Conference be held at Pungo River church, and that it begin on Friday before the 3rd Sunday in October next, and end on Monday.

On motion, Elders Braxton, Moore, Johnson, Heath and Thomas Moore were appointed messengers to the Shiloh Conference.

Voted, that Elder Levi Braxton be requested to deliver the Introductory sermon to the Shiloh Conference, and on his failure, Bryant C. Hood.

Voted, that eight dollars, out of the general fund, be divided between Elders Hays and Clifton to defray their expenses.

Ordered, that 1000 copies of these minutes be printed and distributed, 400 in the Shiloh Conference, and 600 in the Bethel Conference, as usual.

Elders Smith, Hays, and Hearn were appointed to preach on Sunday.

Ordered, that Elder Jesse Heath select, and annex a circular to these minutes of his own choice.

Voted, that the next Bethel Annual Conference be held at Probability church, Duplin Co., and that it commence Thursday before the 2nd Sunday in Nov. next. Elder Jesse Heath is requested to deliver the Introductory sermon, and on his failure, Elder James Moore.

It affords us the utmost satisfaction to state, that through the course of this session, brotherly love continued. Every church in the connexion was represented. The weather, particularly the two last days, was very pleasant, and the congregation was very large, and well entertained, through the course of the meeting; and we do sincerely thank God for the happy interview that we have had with our distant brethren and friends, and for the enjoyment of such a heavenly meeting. We trust great good will be the result.

Voted, to adjourn to time and place of next Conference.

By the letters from the several churches, it appeared that the aggregate number of members was 1900; showing an increase of 668 during the year preceding.¹

¹ This statement was probably not in the minutes but may well have reflected a table accompanying the minutes.

[Circular Letter from Elder Elias Hutchins attached to the minutes]

“To the Elders and brethren who may compose the Free Will Baptist Annual Conference, to convene in Greene county, North-Carolina.

Dear Brethren

As it is impossible for me to attend in person at your Conference, I will attempt to communicate some of my thoughts and feelings to my friends in North Carolina, through the medium of a letter.

The many marks of kindness that I received during my visit among you, and the agreeable interviews that we have enjoyed both at the house of God, and in the domestic circle, have made impressions on my mind, that neither time nor distance can easily remove; and likewise created a solicitude for your welfare, which I trust will not cease till my anxiety for the prosperity of Zion, and the salvation of sinners, shall be lost in death.

The return of your Annual Meeting, when you are permitted to assemble from different and distant parts, for the pleasing purpose of worshiping God together, to hear of the prosperity of Zion, and to consult the best means of promoting the interests of the Redeemer’s Kingdom, is well calculated to fill the devotional and contemplative mind with grateful emotions, and with sensations of the most delightful character.

Should you contrast your present situation with the standing of your brethren 65 years ago, you will discover abundant cause to be thankful for the favors that God has of late conferred upon you. About that time, the most of the Churches and Ministers composing the body to which you now belong, forsook their original principles and united themselves to a body of Christians, whose sentiments, their former brethren could not think accorded with the gospel of Christ. The small number that refused to follow the seceding party, soon

encountered serious difficulties, and their prospects were of a gloomy character. They were illiterate, opposed, considered as heretics, and had all manner of evil spoken of them; and at the expiration of 60 years, this little despised body consisted of only about 800 members. But O, my brethren, what has God done for you in the course of 5 years that are past! The mouths of gainsayers, in many places, have been stopped: much of the prejudice that formerly existed against you, has given place to feelings and sentiments more Christian like and refined; some that were your enemies, have become your friends; and many that were the subjects of the kingdom of darkness, and looking on religion with indifference, have been translated into the kingdom of God's Son, and can now cheerfully unite with you in the worship of the living God. O could some of the old labourers, who were themselves out in the Lord's vineyard, and had many fears, that the few churches that they left behind, would come to nothing after their death; I say could they now take their seats among you, and witness the rich displays of Immanuel's power, that have been made in those regions, tears of joy would roll over their cheeks, and gratitude to God would fill their souls.

But, dear brethren, remember that prosperity is sometimes more fatal than adversity. When the Hebrews were oppressed in Egypt, they cried to the Lord in their afflictions, and he came down to deliver them from their troubles: but when they were prospered in the land of Canaan, they grew proud and rebellious, and thus brought upon themselves evils more distressing than Egyptian bondage. Religious prosperity too often has a tendency to elate the minds of professors, and causes them to think that because they are favored with large additions to their number, they are the favorites of heaven, and Jehovah is particularly partial to them and to their ways; hence bigotry, pride, formality and a strange indifference, or carelessness in the concerns of the soul, are too frequently met with among the professed followers of the Lamb. O may none of these things have a place among you, my dear brethren; but as you increase in number, may you increase in love, humility, meekness, forbearance and in the knowledge of the Lord and

Saviour Jesus Christ.² O! may your peaceable and quiet lives, your godly deportment and your Christian-like conduct, convince all around you, that you know religion to be something more than a mere profession, and faith to be something more than a bare assent to the doctrine of a particular creed.

Permit me here, in much love, and with a due sense of my unworthiness, to point out some evils which have done much harm, and from which I pray God ever to keep us. In some places it often is the case that professors are frequently seen at sales, elections, courts, shows, stores, etc.; and some, on week days, have left the house of God to loiter about. places where little else was to be seen but wickedness and revelry. At such places always may be found those who are not friendly to religion, and who delight in drawing its professors into a snare. Some by such characters, have been prevailed on to drink a little at first: this has created a desire for more, and being now less able to resist their inclination to drink, many have become intoxicated; and their conduct has brought shame and remorse on their own minds, grief and anguish of soul on their brethren and friends, and a reproach on the cause of God!

So much evil has resulted from the practice of drinking before going to meeting, and after returning from it, that the church at Pungo River, as well as many respectable individuals in that part of the country, have laid it aside, and the bottle is now no longer seen among the articles with which their friends are entertained; and I should rejoice to hear that this laudable effort to suppress intemperance, was well seconded by the other churches composing your Conference, and I do hope that an example so well worthy of imitation, will be faithfully copied by all the friends of morality and religion.

But circumstances compel me to draw my communication to a close: and in conclusion, permit me to say that reason and philosophy both, urge on professors of religion the necessity of conforming as much as possible, to the commands and

² Hutchins is referring to the proselyting work of the Calvinistic Baptists that turned most of the original churches to Particular Baptist churches that established the Kehukee Association (Primitive Baptist).

precepts of their adorable Redeemer;
and by this means they will shine as lights in a benighted world, and many seeing their good works, will be induced to glorify their Father who is in heaven.

My mind retraces with peculiar pleasure, mingled with mournful sensations, many of the scenes through which it passed, while I enjoyed the pleasure of your society; and I ardently desire a recurrence of our former happy interviews. But if we are never permitted to meet in this “mournful vale,” O! may we meet beyond tribulation, eternally to be delighted in the presence of Him, at whose right hand are pleasures forever more.

Elias Hutchins

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