Beloit College Archives

Guide to the Beloit College Founding Conventions Records

AC 53

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Repository:       Beloit College Archives
Collection Title: Beloit College Founding Conventions records
Creator:          Beloit College
Date (inclusive): 1841-1870
Extent:           1 linear foot (2 boxes)
Access Note:      This collection is open for research; however, certain materials are very fragile and require Archives staff for handling, or use may be restricted altogether.
Language:         English
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Beloit, Wisconsin 53511-5509

Abstract:        This collection gathers original, photocopies, and transcripts of meetings minutes of the conventions from which arose the founding of Beloit College. These include the four conventions held from August, 1844 through October, 1845, the last of which produced a charter and an elected board of trustees. Other materials include Professor Robert K. Richardson's transcripts and notes regarding these conventions and earlier ones held by various groups such as the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. There are also early college committee documents, and a "reminiscence" from Horace White about this time period.

This finding aid was completed in December 2012, by Michelle Tom. Contents of finding aid are subject to changes and updates as necessary.
Historical Note

"It was the sixth of August, 1844, when the meeting convened in the same old stone church, of
sacred memory. From Iowa came four, from Illinois twenty-seven, from Wisconsin twenty-five-
fifty-six in all. The honest, brave and good brother Kent was called to preside. For two days they
talked and prayed over the question before them, in a frank, earnest, independent spirit, with
some sharp collision of opinions but with harmonious results. They decided that a college ought
immediately to be established in Iowa, and that the exigencies of northern Illinois and Wisconsin
required a college and a female seminary of the highest order to be established, each near the
border line. A committee of ten was appointed to consider the action necessary to carry out the
purpose and report to a future convention. The second convention met in October of the same
year and was composed of fifty members, all from Wisconsin and Illinois. They reaffirmed the
previous decision, but knowing that the success of the enterprise must depend on the hearty
cooperation of the churches, definite action was still deferred and measures were taken, through
circulars and committees of visitation, to give information and awaken interest more generally on
the subject. A third convention, the largest of all, numbering sixty-eight, assembled in May,
1845, and after earnest and prayerful discussion, reviewing the whole subject, with only one
dissenting voice located the College in Beloit. The plans for the female seminary could not then
be matured. In October, 1845, a fourth convention met and adopted a form of charter and elected
a Board of Trustees for the College, and so the ship was launched."

[President Aaron Chapin, in Quarter-Centennial Pamphlet, quoted in Historical Sketches of
Beloit College by President Edward Dwight Eaton. p. 21-22]

The fourth and last of the constituent conventions, held in October, 1845, after adopting a form
of charter and electing a Board of Trustees, adjourned on the twenty-third. A meeting of the new
Board of Trustees was at once held in the same historic church. Of the sixteen members elected
by the convention, eight were present. Of these eight, six were devoted supporters of the College,
all of them men of mark, and all remaining upon the Board as long as they lived, the last of them
passing in 1892, nearly half a century later. They were Rev. Aaron L. Chapin of Milwaukee,
Peet, Rev. Dexter Clary and Mr. Lucius G. Fisher of Beloit.

[Historical Sketches of Beloit College by President Edward Dwight Eaton. p. 24-25]

The four conventions took place at Beloit on the following dates:

- Convention 1: August 7, 1844
- Convention 2: October 29, 1844
- Convention 3: May 27, 1845
- Convention 4: October 31, 1845

Scope and Contents

This collection gathers original, photocopies, and transcripts of meetings minutes of the
conventions from which arose the founding of Beloit College. These include the four
conventions held from August, 1844 through October, 1845, the last of which produced a charter
and an elected board of trustees. Other materials include Professor Robert K. Richardson's
transcripts and notes regarding these conventions and earlier ones held by various groups such as
the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches. There are also early college committee
documents, and a "reminiscence" from Horace White about this time period.
Acquisition and Processing Note

Batches of letters and minutes were originally wrapped together in a paper with descriptions by Dexter Clary, secretary of Beloit College. Those wrappings have been photocopied and the batches of documents contained in folders accordingly.

The contents of the folder titled "Congregational Conventions Papers Regarding Founding a College" were donated to the Beloit College Archives by Ellen Chapin on March 19, 1937. These contents were also removed from Robert K. Richardson's notes and transcripts folder and replaced with photocopies.

The arrangement order has been imposed by the College Archives.

Related Materials

Beloit College Charter and By-Laws records (AC 31)
Aaron L. Chapin papers (MC 1)

Subjects

Beloit College—History
Chapin, Aaron L. (Aaron Lucius), 1817-1892
Richardson, Robert Kimball, 1876-1952

References

"A History of Beloit College and a Sketch of Aaron L. Chapin, One of its Founders and President from 1850 to 1866." H. M. Whitney.
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