



### THE OLD RED TOP

Last time I told you a little about the beginnings of the East Dennis Community Church, which just celebrated the 175th anniversary of its establishment as the Reformed Methodist Society of Dennis and Brewster in 1811. Today I want to tell you the story of the first building to house this society. By 1820 the group of Methodists, which met each month, had become too large for comfortable meetings at members homes. A church building was needed and the members rose to the occasion. Every family pledged what it could, be it money, building material, or labor. The lumber, it is said, was brought from Maine on the Schooner Equality, and landed at East Dennis. From there it was dragged by oxen to the site which the group owned in West Brewster, a site still easily recognized because a small burying ground remains, on Stoney Brook Road. The Rev. Elijah Bailey, long-time minister to Reformed Methodist congregations, preached in this building for eleven years. He instructed his people from the height of a pulpit said to be three stories high, which was surrounded on three sides by galleries, as well as the pews below. The church was painted brown and had a red roof, hence Red Top. I cannot tell whose idea it was to paint the shingled roof red. But I know that painting a shingled roof was not a novel idea in the early 1800's. I only recently read the account book of Eliphalet Edson of Yarmouth Port, who describes how he contracted to finish the new home of Eliakim Studley, an agreement which included painting the roof. The humble building served the church well until 1845. Now it appears that a difference in opinion arose among members as to which branch of the Methodist Church they felt at home. A major split between north and south was happening, due to a southern bishop whose wife's family kept slaves. There were those in the congregation of Dennis and West Brewster who felt that it was not enough to remain in the Reformed branch, but advocated a return to the original principles of John Wesley, an advocate for freedom of the slaves. The Wesleyan Methodists assumed that name in 1845 and in 1847 they built a new church on Center Street in East Dennis. The subsequent history of that church is rich and interesting, but today I plan to tell you the history of the building known as the Old Red Top. For a short while a group of the original Reformed Methodists continued to worship there, but lacking support, the building had to be sold in 1870. The funds obtained by its sale were used to erect and maintain the fence which surrounds the Red Top Cemetery. The building was moved to its present site at 10 Pleasant Street, East Dennis. The first use to which it was put was as a Straw Hat factory. It was run by the partnership known as Sears, Ledwich and Sears. Young women of the neighborhood were taught the fine art of braiding rye or palm leaf straw into five and seven strand braids. The braids were then sewn together as hats for both men and women. Much of the work was done at home by the braiders, while men were employed in stitching and shaping the finished hats. Then it was the job of the local milliners to trim and decorate the ladies hats in the latest fashion. A model of one of these gaily trimmed bonnets can be seen at the Jericho Barn. But the rage for these elaborate straw bonnets waned, the business declined, and eventually failed. The building was next used as a cranberry warehouse, which seems a terrible waste of a lovely building. The house was rescued in 1920 when it was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Karl V. Sears and became their residence. Inside, the building was partitioned into comfortable living quarters, but the outside remains unchanged even today, complete with red roof. As their family grew up Mr. and Mrs. Sears served meals at the Red Top and added a cottage for guests. As the Red Top Inn the building became famous once more, a place where summer visitors were guaranteed a home cooked meal of high quality, complete with home grown vegetables from the host's own garden. Today the old Red Top is the home of Mrs. Grace Nyberg, who graciously allows D.H.S. to visit her whenever we conduct bicycle tours of Quivet Neck, and tells our bicyclers the tales of the old Red Top and its many lives.

Next time: some of the interesting ministers who have served the East Dennis Church.

### FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIRMAN

The United States Postal Service has become very strict in re: delivery of non-profit permit mailings. i.e. third class postage--treating as undeliverable pieces not showing proper name and address, street number, P.O. Box and zip code. Residents who are temporarily away should notify D.H.S. of their forwarding address, dates of departure and return. Also please send us all changes of address, from box to street, new box number, etc. To insure timely receipt of your newsletter, please notify D.H.S. at P.O. Box 607, South Dennis, MA 02660, or by phone 385-2966 in advance of seasonal or other changes. Thank you.

### AMONG OUR NEW MEMBERS

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Lonsdale, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Bohner, Mr. and Mrs. Gordon R. Berry, Arthur E. Ross Jr., William Bellmer, Mr. and Mrs. Roger P. Bryant, Richard D. Ellis, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Modiano. Welcome, all.

## CALENDAR

April 14 7:30 P.M. Board meets at home of Susan and Henry Kelley  
April 22 3:00 P.M. Program meeting---Old Post Cards of Dennis--at West Dennis  
Community Building

### MID-WINTER LUNCHEON--A SELL-OUT CROWD

A group of over 100 enjoyed an excellent luncheon and the marvelous stories told by friend Jay Crowell at the annual festivity held at Christine's last month. President Nancy Howes was regretably unable to be with us, due to a back problem which we are happy to report is improving day by day. Life membership certificates were presented to Susan Kelley, Fred Eble and Paul Mcquire. Certificates of appreciation were presented to our recent past president, Sarah Kruger for her years of service to D.H.S. and to Harold Merriam who has recently completed indexing the past twelve years of the newsletter. We were happy to welcome Jean and Bill Taylor, long time members, who for many years were planners of this annual February activity. Both of them look just great! The speaker did his father proud, and had us all remembering some of the characters we have known and savoured in our lifetime. Door prizes were as follows:

Book Scuttle Watch won by Barney Erk  
Antique map of Dennis--Shirley Webster  
Cup Plate, East Dennis Church--Don Swain  
Luncheon Gift Certificate donated by Christine's--Polly Derick  
Book Cape Cod Remembrance--Jim Crowe  
Flower arrangement--Ben Hildebrant

Special thanks to all of you who took over Nancy's duties and made everything run smoothly.

### RECENT ACQUISITIONS

We have many to report, some purchased by the Board, and some gifts. Let me just mention a few and catch you up on the rest next time. By gift of the former Thursday Evening Circle of West Dennis, minutes and scrapbooks, detailing the activities of this social group, active for 50 years. This is a fine source of information for future researchers on the types of community projects undertaken in the past 50 years. Also by gift, from Norma and Arthur Ross, a collection of pictures of West Dennis, circa 1900. By gift from the Howes Family Association, a book, The Autobiography of Osborne Howes. See next paragraph for another acquisition of importance.

### FANNY HOWES MAKES HER SAMPLER

You know a little about some of the samplers which have been collected over the years, the work of the fingers of several of this town's young girls over several generations past. D.H.S. has now acquired a sampler worked by Fanny Howes, the daughter of Lothrop and Elizabeth (Taylor) Howes of East Dennis. She was born in 1822, one of seven children of that family, and by her sampler we know that she was taught by the same teacher who supervised Eunice Paddock's work in 1827. We are trying to discover who this teacher of needlework was. Fanny's sampler has the same stitches, her lovely padded flowers across the bottom are nearly identical to those done by young Eunice a few years earlier. The Sampler will be examined by the textile experts at Andover and if required steps will be taken to preserve this work of art, done over 150 years ago by a 12 year old girl who lived in our town.

Thanks go to Robert Eldred, The Sandwich Heritage Plantation, and the Howes Family Association for their assistance in acquiring this sampler.

**ATTENTION:** Ezra H. Baker field trips are scheduled for June 1st and June 4-8. **WE NEED HELP**, especially at Jericho House. Ice cream makers, and people to help teach the maritime unit especially needed. **WILL TRAIN.** We are an equal opportunity employer, and we want you all to have an opportunity to be a part of our very successful school program. It's Fun. Please call Nancy Reid--398-8842 or Lilla Smith--398-3367 if you can help.

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