

## Memories of the Old Session House

[By E. H. Cartwright]  
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In the years before 1858, Wednesday evening prayer meetings were held in the old Town House or Hook School House. In the morning before the meeting was to be held pious housekeepers rubbed up their brass candlesticks and each good woman placed her home-made candle in one, added a few matches and on entering the room placed the same on the desk of the leader of the meeting. A row of candles would be lighted in order that the leader might have light enough to see to read a selection from the Scriptures, and possibly a sermon from some orthodox minister, and read the number of the hymns chosen for the congregation to sing. The extra candles were lighted and passed to those present to give them light to sing the hymns, then blown out until the next hymn was sung, when the extra matches were used. The meetings were conducted by the pastor, elders or laymen connected with the church and were often blessed to those who attended. In 1858 the Rev. Stephen L. Mershon, then pastor of the First Presbyterian church of East Hampton, was instrumental in raising money and having the Session Room built. Money was scarce in those days and many sacrifices were made, and much consecrated effort went into the building. Shortly before the room was finished a prayer meeting was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Osborne (the home now owned by E. M. and S. Gardner Osborn). No formal notice had been given of the service and I think it was not Wednesday evening when it was held, but when the hour arrived for the meeting to open the room was filled and it soon became evident to all present that the spirit of God was moving in many hearts. Soon after,

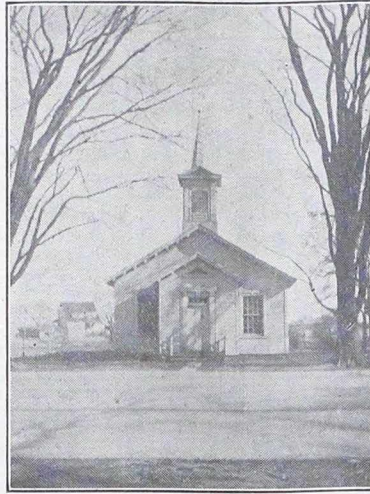
the first service was held in the then new session room, on a week day afternoon. Very little work was done in our village at that hour. I well remember Mr. Charles Frank and Lyman Babcock of Amagansett, were working as carpenters for my grandfather and their stopping their work to attend the meeting.

The red and black carpet that covered the floor, the chandelier with six kerosene lamps, and two lights at the back of the pulpit, the hair-cloth sofa on the pulpit, and the square hymn book with notes that replaced the village hymn books of small size and type were largely due to the efforts of The Ladies' Sewing Society and its leaders, Mrs. Charles Osborne, Mrs. Esther Hedges and Miss Kate Hand, who had been unsparing in time and labor. The society met in different houses of the members of the congregation and at its close the work of the afternoon and evening was laid aside and Mr. Mershon would come in and read a chapter from the Bible and offer a prayer for a blessing on the efforts of the society.

The room was filled with devout souls who sincerely desired God's blessing. There was no musical instrument, other than a tuning fork held by the sainted I. Otis Hunting, who for more than forty years either led or sang in the choir. The singers sat at the right of the reading desk—Mr. and Mrs. E. T. Jones, Charles Mulford, George Filer, Abel Huntington, Miss Phebe Isaacs, Miss Cecelia Huntington, Miss Julia Parsons, Miss Fannie Hedges, Miss Belle Miller, Miss Libbi Miller and Miss Kate Bennett. Jeremiah Conklin from Amagansett, was invited to join the choir, and as a child I was greatly impressed with the fervor his deep bass voice sang out in the first hymn. "Lord revive us—Lord revive us. All our help must come from Thee" sung to the tune of Greenville.

The preparatory service for the communion was marked by an unusual number of young people being present. Some thought the novelty of the new building was the cause, but at the close of the next evening's service many remained in their seats,

## Presbyterian Session House



thus signifying their desire for religious instruction.

Then followed three precious months in the history of the church. Night after night the building was filled. Religion was the one thought of almost the entire community and from many lips issued the question "what must I do to be saved." With solemn tones the dear old hymns—Oh There Will Be Mourning, Come Humble Sinner, Lo, on a Narrow Neck of Land, were sung with a blessing to many, and the truly earnest efforts and preaching of the pastor and people were crowned with the glorious result that more than one hundred souls confessed Christ at the next communion. Dr. John D. Stokes succeeded Mr. Mershon, and in 1867 another revival was witnessed and a goodly number gave out-

ward evidence of their faith. Those were simple commonplace days. During Mr. Mershon's ministry the greatest worldly pleasure was the singing school, conducted by George B. Reeve of Mattituck, Young and old met, from Wainscott, Amagansett and Springs, and there was real harmony in the manner. "Minnehaha," "I Was a Wandering Sheep," "The Sleighing Song" and "Tranquillo," were sung.

The boys used to crowd around the gate and go home with the girls. Some few lingered around the stove and offered to escort the fair one home but that method seldom met with favor and many times dear old Uncle Otis was asked "Oh Uncle Otis won't you go home with me for if you don't—is waiting at the stove for me and I don't want him." He

never refused the request. Wednesday and Saturday evenings were prayer meeting nights and no parties, rides or social activities of any sort were expected to crowd out attendance on them. No young persons, however attractive, could hope for recognition in desirable society if they failed to be regular at these meetings. In those days mothers possessed the ability to see to it that their boys and girls were present, as well as themselves. I cannot recall ever hearing any of the young people saying it was a hardship. In 1876 there was another revival. The Moody and Sankey hymn books then came into use and many of the hymns added force to the sermons preached. Miss Mary Dayton (now Mrs. C. S. Parsons) was then organist and Dr. Stokes said he felt that she was a great help to him, for never once in the months the meetings were held did she fail to at once respond, without having to turn to her book, whenever he asked for a particular hymn or to select one that fitted his remarks.

March of that year witnessed a large addition to our church. The Saturday evening service was conducted by one of the elders or a layman, and David H. Hunting, M. A. Parsons, George Eldredge, and J. S. Osborne, Edgar Parsons and Dr. Ayres were gifted in prayer and ability to make life-long impressions for good. A Mr. Sanford from Bridgehampton held meetings with Dr. Stokes in 1856 that resulted in another large addition to the church. Those were simple, lovely days. Many a romance had its beginning at the old Session Room gate. If the affair prospered the young man, after a time, on a Sunday evening would call on the lady before church and escort her to a seat in the side of the room, but when on a Sunday evening he led her to a seat in the center we were prepared to hear that dress-makers were spoken for and often a wedding took place. Sometimes the boys from Bridgehampton, Southampton and Sag Harbor came and took girls to church not always to the gratification of the East Hampton boys.

How many sacred and blessed memories crowd our mind as we recall those days. When the house was being built the ill-fated vessel the John Milton, was wrecked off Montauk and the entire crew perished. The bell was torn from its fastenings and, its beam, was caught between two rocks and rang over the dead until the storm was over, when it was brought ashore and hung in the belfry.

Many who have heeded its call heard and accepted the Christ preached in the old room, are now around the great white throne. Dear old room! May many more be led under its roof to the "God of our Fathers." Few are now living who saw the dedication and the number grows less rapidly, as the years roll by. What better prayer can we offer than the one so often used by Thomas Isaacs "and when the Saturday of our lives shall come may our work be done and well done and we have nothing to do at the last but to fall asleep in the arms of Jesus and awake in his likeness in heaven. Amen and Amen."

Don't miss the August clearance sale at the Antoinette Shop.—Adv.

Orders taken for home-made cakes and pies at the Capitol Lunch. Telephone 89.—Adv.

F. H. Condit, optometrist eyesight specialist, will be at American Legion room, Wednesday, August 18; hours 10 to 2.—Adv.

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