



✠ CONSECRATION ✠

OF THE

≡ Church of the Messiah ≡

Woods Hole, Massachusetts,

✠ TUESDAY, JULY 2, 1889 ✠

BY

The Right Reverend Benjamin H. Packard, D.D.,

BISHOP OF MASSACHUSETTS.



# From the Archivists

## Woods Hole Historical Collection

*Jennifer Stone Gaines*

Last summer marked the one hundredth anniversary of the consecration of the stone building of the Church of the Messiah in Woods Hole.

In preparation for the celebration, the archives of the church and the Woods Hole Historical Collection were carefully studied. Many interesting facts and anecdotes came to light. These were used by volunteers from both organizations to weave the story of the church which was presented to the congregation in several ways. Most dramatic was an oral presentation by Lauren Carson, story-teller, teacher and member of the congregation. Using materials from the archives committee, she told a complete and moving history of the church. Her performance was one of the high points of a glorious and joyous service of celebration led by the Rt. Rev. David E. Johnson, D.D.

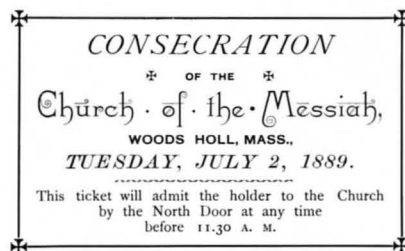
The committee also mounted an exhibit in the parish hall, Fisher House, which spanned the life of the church, from 1852 to the present. Photographs, paintings and documents from both the church and the Historical Collection and from private collections were displayed with the aid of the Collection's expertise in the construction of exhibits.

Coincidentally, a unique collection of bills, receipts and letters was given to our Bradley House archives by Robert W. Griffin, whose ancestors have lived in Woods Hole "from the beginning." All of the items

concern the Church of the Messiah in the 1880s and 90s, spanning the time between the old wooden church building and the Gothic stone structure. This timely gift was used in the exhibit. Most of the bills were from local businesses, some of which are very familiar to us today. For instance, there is a bill from H.V. Lawrence, florist, for 12 holly wreaths for \$3.00. Also, there is a bill from "F.L. Gifford, House, Sign and Carriage painter." This is Franklin Lewis Gifford, who is better known today as the artist of the oil paintings portraying Woods Hole history, many of which are displayed at the Woods Hole Library. The bills document the commerce and beauty of the age. Even these humble bills are works of art with their fine calligraphy, both on the printed documents and also in the signatures written on them.

The cooperation behind the scenes of the centennial celebration is a good example of how local historical societies can serve and work with other local organizations. It was a fine opportunity for sharing and helping each other, to our mutual benefit.

An early recollection from the Fay family papers in our archives was written by Sarah Bryant Fay about the old wooden church of her childhood. Sarah was the daughter of Joseph Story Fay, the greatest benefactor of the Church of the Messiah.



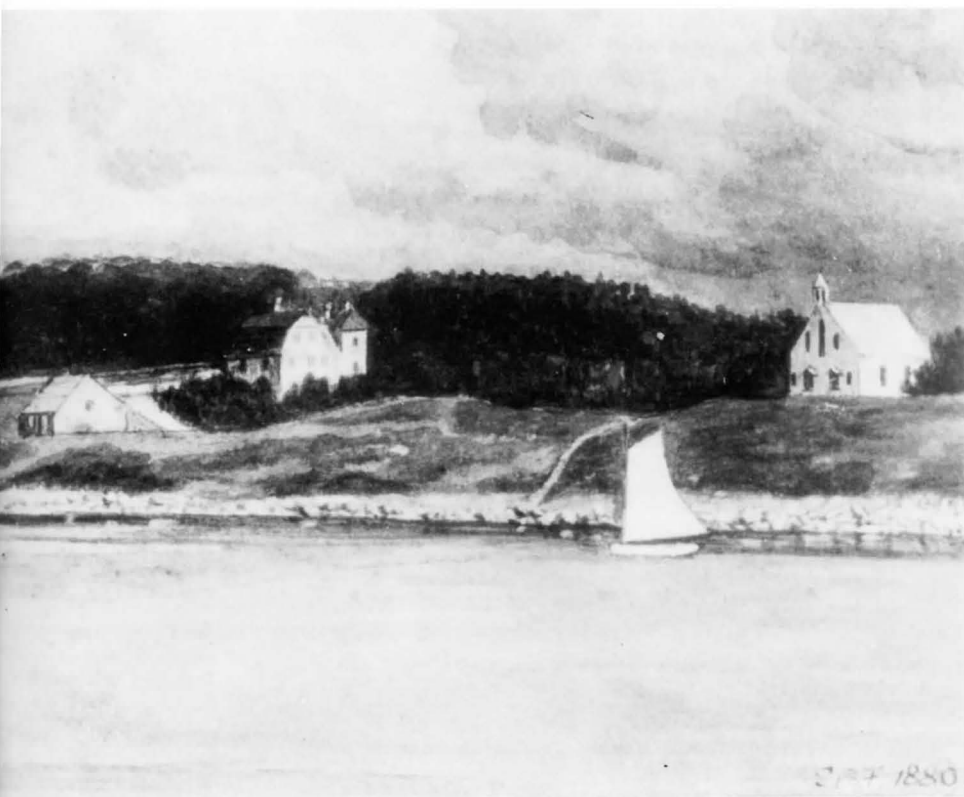
Ticket to the Consecration of The Church of the Messiah, July 2, 1889. Courtesy WHHC.

When I am asked for my early recollections I must say that one of the dearest sounds of my life has been the old Church bell; it is woven through so many years and full of so many memories, and heard after any absence, brings the tears to my eyes in spite of myself. Yea, even mingled with the newer and discordant tongues of Methodist and Congregational! It is one of the earliest sounds I remember clearly, too. Sunday clothes were a trial to a little child, even when limited to the choice between the pink or the green gingham, and when the struggle of getting dressed was over, I was turned out doors with the words "There now, go like a good girl and pick a bouquet for Church," which was, as I now see it, a device to allow my elders to array themselves in peace. So the bell brings back the lattice gate, the little garden, the prim gravel walks and I am again the little girl choosing with intense seriousness the tiny spire of Canterbury bells, a gay bit of scarlet London Pride, and some Sweet Alyssum, binding them together with a blade of striped grass. I walk sedately up the road, which no one then would have dreamed of calling the street, holding my father's hand, and easily looking over the little, young trees on the harbor bank, which then gave small promise of the good dense shade of today.

No highroad to the Church! Gates to be opened to cross the field by Simeon Hamblin's house, and a cart track to follow down a hill that seemed very steep to little feet, while perhaps the last bell was tolling.

The church, with its little belfry from which this impressive voice came, was painted a dark reddish brown without; and inside, in imitation of, well, marble perhaps, in blocks of white, pink, lavender and tan, arranged according to the painter's pleasure; for it was a vain but satisfying occupation during those early sermons, after the flowers were duly pulled to pieces, to try to follow out any pattern in them. The pews were dark brown, painted and varnished pine, and once, when newly done over, one might stick to them in a very exciting manner. A gilt chandelier, (which I never remember to have seen lighted), hung from the middle rafter of the open





Watercolor painting by Sarah Bryant Fay (1856-1936) showing, from right to left, the original 1852 wooden Church of the Messiah, a spritsail boat sailing in Little Harbor, the old rectory built by Joseph Story Fay in 1877 and the farm buildings of Reuben and Simeon Hamblin. Courtesy Elizabeth Fay.

roof. The Communion Table was a rough frame work, covered with crimson damask, draped across in folds, and caught up at each corner with tassels, nothing on it but the necessary books.

The melodeon stood at one side beyond the front seat of the side aisle on which the singers sat, with their backs to the congregation. I remember first of all Miss Higgins playing, and the quartette singing the good old tunes: Mr. and Mrs. Tasker, and Mr. and Mrs. Louis Swift, standing shoulder to shoulder, holding the big, fat, oblong tune books, and swaying slightly from side to side, to mark the time.

Of the early Sunday School which was held in the basement of the Church, I know nothing, but I remember that about 1861 or 1862, it was used as a Summer School room for three very active lads, on whose teacher, a warm hearted Irish lady who often played the melodeon for Church, many pranks were played. These culminated one day when they wished to go fishing, in their persuading one of Mr. Jabez Davis's cows into the school room, and then running away leaving her there. The legend says the teacher passed the interlude standing on a table.

The early rectors pass dimly before me. Mr. Flower whose rugged and clean shaven face I confuse with a picture of Henry Clay much seen about that period, Mr. West and Mr. Robinson; until came good Mr. Carleton, who marks what I would call a second period of the Church life, and thus begins another Chapter.

In this the bell played a considerable part, for I often acted sexton, and rang it myself. I fancy many of us remember the squeak of the vestry door when Mr. Carleton peered through the crack as a signal to begin the voluntary and stop the tolling. If a belated member of one's family was seen hurrying up the hill from the front gallery window, that bell did not always stop at the first creak, and Mr. Carleton would open the door wider and wave up at us.

Mr. Carleton was especially kind to the young people, and we were very glad to help him in every way at his self imposed task as sexton, and furnace man. Our church life really dated from that time, for we began to love the services.

About then a very high church family, the Causten Brownes, were here for the Summer, and they were used to daily afternoon service which Mr. Carleton was glad to establish, and a small congregation attended regularly.

Mr. Carleton was kind and good, and truly religious, and every one loved him and tried to please him. He was also very erudite, and his sermons, so carefully prepared, were sometimes too deep for our understanding, but we took great pride in his learning and his Greek researches and publications. Once prepared, his sermons were delivered, "whether or no," and I remember one very rainy Sunday when he preached a fine discourse against the "plaiting of hair and putting on of apparel," to an audience of five weather beaten men, all sea captains and farmers, and two girls. To us girls he afterward apologized, saying, "We were such plain dressers he knew we didn't need it, but it was all ready, and he had to get it off, if it wasn't a bright Sunday!"

It was under Mr. Carleton the parish was inspired to make the Church more attractive, or at least more Churchly. It was newly painted inside and out; plain gray outside, and inside the old pink and lavender blocks and their weather stains gave place to plainer and richer coloring; a new altar, font and furniture for the chancel.

A new cabinet organ at which Miss Eldridge officiated so faithfully, and some of the young people went into the choir, assisted by Mr. Ezekiel Swift and Mr. Rankin. Then came hymnals too, and the old four part singing books were relegated to a dark corner under a pew.

Good old Dr. Carleton! He was kind to all, and the twinkle in his eye won him many a point with his people.

With him properly ends what I can call my earliest recollections which I offer to my friends young and old, wishing you "good luck in the name of the Lord, ye who are of the house of the Lord."

*Wm E. E. Swift for Church of Missions*  
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Bills from local businesses to  
The Church of The Messiah in  
1888, 1889, 1895. Courtesy  
WHHC.