

## Raithby History

The village of Raithby nestles in a valley at the foot of the beautiful Helderberg mountain. Raithby was well known for its delicious strawberries and its proud Methodist tradition. The church and school were key landmarks in the area and have been instrumental in producing excellent community leadership ever since it was established in 1844 by the first Methodist missionary to South Africa, Rev. Barnabas Shaw.

Raithby has had a fascinating history closely linked to the expansion of the Methodist Church in South Africa. The Rev. Barnabas Shaw arrived at Cape Town for the first time in 1815. He established the Methodist mission station at Leliefontein in Namaqualand and from 1833 he preached at Stellenbosch where he and Rev. Edward Edwards were instrumental in establishing Methodism. Shaw also established the mission at Somerset West in 1834 which he at the time called Brackenbury's Valley as Mrs. Sarah Brackenbury of Raithby Hall, Lincolnshire, in England had donated one hundred pounds for him to buy the land on which the present Methodist Church and mission grounds were established.

More or less halfway between Stellenbosch and Somerset West was an area called Moddergat where Shaw preached once every second Sunday. On October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1844 Shaw bought the farm "Kuiken Vallei" at Moddergat and he called it Raithby after Raithby Hall in England where his benefactor, Mrs. Sarah Brackenbury lived. Shaw built a chapel at Raithby and converted a stable into a school in 1845. The chapel was duly finished and opened on 5<sup>th</sup> November 1845 by Shaw himself and the afternoon service was preached by his son, Rev. B. James Shaw.

Shaw formed the settlement at Raithby for 'coloured' people/freed slaves after the emancipation of slavery in 1834, letting the land to them in small allotments so while hiring themselves out to the farmers, they could cultivate their land in their spare time and send their children to day-school.

Raithby went from strength to strength, growing as a Methodist village in which erf holders planted crops, particularly strawberries on their land, marketing it in Somerset West and Cape Town. The school enrolments increased, and the Raithby Methodist School became an important institution in the region together with the Methodist schools at Stellenbosch and Somerset West.

In 1967 Raithby was under threat of being declared a "white" area under the infamous Groups Area Act. The Church fought this diabolical suggestion tooth and nail and won the day. Since that time the Trust Properties Committee and the Raithby Glebe Management Committee undertook to pass transfer of the land to the erfholders whose families had lived on it nearly one and a half century. This was finally achieved in 1986 and since the time rapid development of services within the town has taken place. The roads were tarred, the water supply expanded, and the church renovated. Street lighting has been laid on and the first switch-on of street lights took place in July 1991.

Raithby has been an active force of in the development of the Stellenbosch Circuit of the Methodist Church. It has produced an eminent corps of church, community and educational leaders over the years.

It is said that Raithby has the highest percentage of professional, tertiary trained persons (mostly teachers and lecturers) per capita in Western Cape.

In 1984 a freehold title passed to all erfholders by the Methodist Church. They could now buy the land they occupy from the church.

The history of Raithby 1940 – 2000 was documented in an excellent book by Catherine Willemse (nee Samuels) – “Met ‘n diepe verlange – ‘n Memorie van Raithby”. Catherine (Katie) grew up in Raithby and wrote a deeply moving story about her beloved village.



*Raithby Hall*

Prof. Harold Herman