

Speech delivered at town meeting -
Provincetown - MARCH 13, 1961
(REGARDING ART. 53 - SECTION 4)
by Josephine DEL DEO

The subject of the Province Lands that we are discussing here tonight is one of the most important matters that has ever come before a Town Meeting. What we vote here and now will undoubtedly change or retain the character of Provincetown from this date forward.

I don't propose to go into detail on the history of the Province Lands, their position in the public domain since the first landing of the Pilgrims, their value to Provincetown as a wooded protective barrier between the land and the sea or even their economic value as a semi-wilderness of great beauty bordering on a highly cultured art center which attracts a specialized and professional clientele to our town. What I would like to dwell on more specifically tonight are some facts which you as voters and taxpayers should be made aware of before you vote on this question.

First of all, you should know that any acquisition in the Province Lands is going to raise our tax rate if that development is anything but industrial or commercial. No residential area brings in enough in new tax assessments to support its maintenance without an overall increase in the tax rate. If the area pays for itself, then it will have to be used for other than residential purposes and it will develop into a commercial annex to Provincetown which in time will be in direct competition with the town. Moreover, I feel strongly that the latter condition will be inevitable even if a residential zoning is promised. Two or three years from now, or even five, when this controversy has quieted down, it will be very simple to call a special town meeting and amend the zoning laws applying to the Province Lands. Once this is done, an avalanche of variances will follow...witness the history of variances to date in Provincetown. A mere provision in a report does not guarantee anything, it simply delays the day when the land will be devoured by profiteering. I think it is clear from this that we are faced with

two alternatives if we take this land...1. a rising tax rate, or 2. a commercial development siphoning trade from our established businesses. To me, these are not desirable alternatives to our present situation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would also like to bring to your attention a few facts in relation to the political history of the move to acquire the Province Lands.

In June, 1960, the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, was authorized to testify in Washington to the effect that Provincetown wanted approximately 1400 acres of the Province Lands. As you know, about the same time, Van Ness Bates published a report which cost the town \$1500, giving us a fanciful and outrageous idea of what we could do with the land once we got it. No one suggested at the time that God had already engineered the land into a development of superb value and beauty. Gradually, Provincetown became aware of what was really happening as the result of the alertness of a few citizens. Much of the information on these reports and their implications had been played down by the press and officials. In the early fall of last year, the Emergency Committee for Preservation of the Province Lands was formed and we have been working ever since to keep these lands in the public domain. At the same time, the local Planning Board was authorized to proceed with the matter of determining what to do with the Province Lands once we got them. Senator Stone also appointed a commission composed of Rudolph Bessette, Dir. of the Div. of Waterways, John Snow, Chairman of the P'town Board of Selectmen, and Mr. Ham, Chairman of the Planning Board, to study the matter of the Province Lands. This commission was directed to file its report not later than the last Wednesday of December, 1960. This report was completed on December 28, 1960 but has not yet been filed with the Massachusetts General Court so that a public hearing could be held as prescribed. The first that this report was made public was in Washington on March 7 of this year. The reasons are clear. There has been a deliberate attempt to slice these Province Lands out of the Cape Cod National Park before the people of Provincetown knew what was going on

and could raise a protest strong enough to be heard in Washington.

Furthermore, this report specifies an area to be taken approximately five times the present built-up portion of the town. Can any resident take seriously this proposal when we know there is still enough land in Provincetown to build at least 550 homes on $\frac{1}{2}$ acre lots? This commission further recommended that lots were to be not less than $\frac{3}{4}$ s of an acre when at the same time no mention is made of the maximum size of lots or sections that may be bought so that the door is left wide open for any kind and size of development to step in and buy up large portions of the land providing the developer has the cash to do so. There has been a great deal of superficial sympathy shown to the small home-owner in Provincetown who is crowded into very small lots on our narrow streets but I beg to propose that these small home-owners will never be able to raise the money for those new lots in the Province Lands and that by far the greater percentage of that land will be sold in much larger lots to people who already own the most valuable property or to persons out of town who can come in and afford the investment. It is the same old story: the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

As to the need for recreation and park area which the commission has provided for, we will have plenty of that in the National Park at far less cost to the town.

I presume all of you citizens here have received copies of the last two sections of this report which points out that the Board which will supervise the subdivision of the Province Lands acquired by the town will be composed of Mr. Bessette, Mr. Snow and Mr. Ham. It seems very obvious from this that Provincetown will still be tied up with the State in the development of this land and will be largely subject to the jurisdiction of a man who has a life tenure in office with the State and who is not subject to any pressures or sentiments expressed by the people of Provincetown if he chooses to ignore us. In other words, the needs of the town may take a back seat to outside motivations and interests.

I think it is very important for the voters to know that in his testimony in

Washington, the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen had no official authorization from the Board other than the mandate that was given him last year at the hearings in Washington. In the meantime, two of our selectmen had changed their minds on the matter of the Province Lands, and said so. They also said he did not consult them as to what his testimony would be or what changes he would ask for in the park boundaries. In claiming to represent them, therefore, he has misrepresented the truth.

I am certain he has also misrepresented the majority of Provincetown voters and taxpayers and I would like to see an overwhelming vote against the taking of the Province Lands to show all officials everywhere, here in Provincetown, in Boston and in Washington, that we still have the mandate to decide this issue and we are going to decide once and for all to keep these lands in the condition in which we inherited them for ourselves, our children and our children's children, forever and ever. I thank you.