

*Notes Concerning a Letter to the Board  
of Selectmen About the Province Lands*

VAN NESS  
BATES  
STILL TRYING

*Sometime after Oct. 9 - R.M.  
1961*

The matter we wish to bring to your attention is, we think, important because it concerns the Province Lands and the boundary of the National Park in this area. For some time the Committee for the Preservation of the Province Lands has been apprehensive about the possibility of a further attempt to secure parts of the Province Lands for exploitation. We have written the Board of Selectmen in an endeavor to find out their attitude toward the state-owned lands, and we have received no reply that we can interpret as meaningful.

To go back to the Annual Meeting of March 13, there was a discussion as to whether the vote on the Province Lands questions would be binding. From the floor a voter pointed out that, and I quote from the account of the meeting in a local paper of March 15, "the vote on at least question 4 was important, in that the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen had publicly stated that he would act in accordance with the voters wishes regarding the Province Lands acquisition; that the matter would be pursued no farther should the vote be against the Town's getting the land". Immediately after ~~this~~ the Chairman himself took the floor to confirm this. The vote on question 4 was 144 to 61 against taking any of the Province Lands.

Despite this we find in the New York Times of August 6, ##### in an article on the National Park by reporter Sheldon Binn, this idea expressed by our Chairman of Selectmen. "He (the Chairman) said that the selectmen hoped to convince the state that part of state-owned lands in the area, probably slated for inclusion in the National Seashore area, should be given to the town to develop facilities for tourists"

At about the same time, August 9 to be exact, there was published in the "Public Forum" column of the Cape Cod Standard Times a letter from Mr. Van Ness Bates, who signed himself as "Executive Vice-President, Massachusetts Improvement Association, # 70 State Street, Vice Boston, Mass. In the Bates letter, which is headed "Not Appomatox But Bull Run", is a paragraph devoted to Provincetown and the Province Lands. I quote this paragraph.

"The Massachusetts Improvement Association will undertake to file appropriate legislation for the consideration of the incoming General Court which would prevent the transfer of any parts of the Province Lands to the Federal Government under Section 2-A of the bill, # unless further revisions and deletions of Long Point and lands south and west of Beach Road and Provincetown Beach are made in favor of the town".

With the statements by the Chairman of Selectmen, by Mr. Bates, and with sundry other statements, reportedly emanating from Town Hall of the same tenor, the Committee for the Preservation of the Province Lands authorized a letter to the Board of # Selectmen asking for a straightforward clarification of their position touching the disposition of the Province Lands.

That letter, which was dated September 11 and signed directly by Ross Moffett and Charles A. Mayo, Jr., is summarized as follows:

It respectfully asks the Board for information in regard to possible action the Board may intend towards the Province Lands in their inclusion in the National Park.

The letter points out that, as the town itself is given over more and more to commercialism, the Province Lands in their natural state become increasingly the most valuable asset left to the town.

It points out the large majorities by which, in the Annual Town Meeting, the citizens voted down all measures to restrict the National Park by keeping out for commercial purposes areas of the Province Lands.

The letter discloses that before, during, and immediately after the Town Meeting, the Chairman and other members of the board said that the vote of citizens would be complied with by the town officials.



It brings out that, despite earlier protestations to the contrary, On August 6 the Chairman, apparently ~~for the selectmen~~ as a whole, was expressing a renewed desire to deny sections of the Province Lands to the National Park, as delimited by act of Congress a few days earlier.

The letter refers to a similar intent of Mr. Bates and to a similar sentiment reported in conversations with the Town Manager.

The Board is asked to say frankly whether it intends to reopen the Province Lands controversy, which most Provincetown citizens had hoped was settled once and for all.

The letter asks the Board, in case it intends further action to acquire state-owned lands, to state how much land it expects to request from the General Court, together with the conditions governing the control, disposal, and use of the area involved.

It points out that last winter the citizens were for some two and one-half months kept in complete ignorance of a most vital report, dated December 28, 1960, which would have placed the control and disposal of 1476 acres of the Province Lands entirely in the hands of the Chairman of Selectmen, the Chairman of the Planning Board, and the Director of the Division of Waterways

The letter ends by making clear that it does not allude to the proposed \$850,000 marina near the Provincetown Inn, to be paid for jointly by the state and by the town. The letter refers only to areas of the Province Lands over and above the some 30 acres required for a marina.

The reply to our letter was received about a month later, October 9, and is as follows:

"Gentlemen: The Board of Selectmen of the Town of Provincetown has instructed me to answer your letter of September 11, 1961.

They wish me to inform you ~~at~~ at this time that all actions of townspeople at Town Meetings are contained in the Town Meeting Records and that all actions of the Board of Selectmen are contained in Records of Selectmen's Meetings both of which are public records and may be obtained and read by public at any time. Very truly yours," The letter is signed by the Town Clerk.

Now it would seem that our letter to the Selectmen asks some explicit questions for which we might expect direct and explicit answers. The letter ~~sent to us~~ by the Board does not bear out these expectations. So far as we can see, not one question in our letter has been answered. Save for the informal and unofficial reaction of one individual member, we are as uncertain about the intentions of the Board as we were before writing them. If the Board intends to conform to the expressed opinion of the Town Meeting in regard to the Province Lands, it would be a simple matter to say so. But this the Board has not done. If they do not concur in the ideas of their Chairman in his New York Times interview, they have not said so. If they are not involved with Mr. Bates in his declared intention towards the National Park in this area, they have taken, so far as we know, no action to disown him.

Bringing this to attention at this time may possibly result in some clarification where our letter failed. If not it may bring out an increasing awareness that, in spite of the act of the National Congress, the Province Lands will not be safe from exploitation until they are actually transferred by the general Court to the Federal Government.