

# 2 Days After Landmark Tag Shed Wreckers Strike At Sunrise

By Alan Bernheimer

With timing that was breathtaking in its irony, Provincetown's last trap shed was destroyed hours after the Coast Guard added its authority to interests trying to save the building, and just two days after it was nominated to the National Registry of Historic Places.

The destruction, 6 a.m. Friday morning, left a shambles on the West End beach, the possibility of prosecutions for state Wetlands Act and Town bylaw violations, bitterly disappointed preservationists in Provincetown, and surprised Coast Guard officials.

Not surprised was Bernard Benkovitz, who plans to sell the Cape Cod Cold Storage plant site to the Coast Guard for its proposed new search-and-rescue station. The trap shed, once part of the plant, stood on a pier abutting the site.

Speaking Monday by telephone from Pittsburgh, Pa., Benkovitz said he gave the order to demolish the shed early in the week. "It was supposed to come down Tuesday or Wednesday," he said, adding he was afraid of jeopardizing the Coast Guard's purchase of the site if the building remained.

The final option calls for its removal as an "encumbrance." A private owner is not legally bound to preserve historic structures, but a federal agency, such as the Coast Guard, is.

The building's fate hung in the balance last week as local preservationists pressed for the Coast Guard's help. A last-minute telegram from Capt. Norman Scherer, First Coast Guard District chief of staff, was sent 4 p.m. Thursday to Benkovitz at his Live Fish Company in Pittsburgh, requesting a three-week reprieve for the trap shed so the Historic District Study Committee could relocate it.

The historic committee was not actually interested in relocating the building, as they made clear at a meeting with Benkovitz in Provincetown last Monday, but wanted time to marshal forces towards preserving the shed in place as a trap fishing museum, side by side with the search-and-rescue station.

Pressure through the Department of Transportation (of which the Coast Guard is an agency), the National Council on Historic Preservation, and Rep. Gerry



**Trap Shed: a shambles on beach Monday morning. Nominated for landmark status Wednesday, it was razed Friday at dawn.**

Studds succeeded in softening the Coast Guard's "hands-off" policy articulated at its Provincetown public meeting, but failed to prevent the surprise razing.

### "It's Coming Down"

Benkovitz said he told the historic committee last Monday they could have the trap shed but must remove it. "They said, 'That's where it belongs.' I said, 'It's coming down,'" Benkovitz said.

"They had every chance to get the thing out of there," he added, "—six months, since last October." Benkovitz said the site should have been cleared from the harbor in, and that he had done the committee a favor delaying the trap shed's fall this long, incurring extra expenses for liability insurance.

Benkovitz said he had not received the

Coast Guard telegram, and indicated it would have made little difference in his plans.

The early hour of the demolition, and the fact that the demolition team disappeared for four days immediately afterward, left a bad taste in already sour mouths. But Benkovitz said the trap shed was included in the demolition contract and had been carried out by "Mr. Cooper, a member of the demolition team."

Salvatore Del Deo, who owns a West End restaurant near the site, happened on the razing in progress and tried to halt it, but failed. Later Friday morning and afternoon, copies of the Coast Guard telegram were received by the Advocate and the historic committee with anticlimactic irony.

Destruction of the trap shed may have violated the state Wetlands Protection Act and a Town bylaw against harbor dumping. Although no bulldozer was apparently put on the beach for the razing, much of the structure fell from the wooden pier where it stood onto the sand.

### Possible Violations

The Provincetown Conservation Commission was scheduled to meet yesterday to consider action against Benkovitz. Chairman Joseph Notaro said fines could reach \$1000 for each day of violation.

Large pieces of debris floated into the harbor across the navigation lane as the tide rose, and Selectman Warren Alexander said Monday the Town's anti-dumping bylaw, which provides up to \$50 fines, could be invoked.

In addition, Robert Wilkins, building inspector, wrote Benkovitz Monday, saying the West End lot was "abandoned, unsafe, and a public nuisance." Wilkins gave him till noon Tuesday to start corrective work, and seven days to complete the clean-up.

Workers were in evidence Tuesday morning, and were removing the trap shed's wreckage without putting trucks or bulldozers on the beach. Notaro warned such action would have constituted a Wetlands Act violation.

Lt. Thomas Schaeffer, Coast Guard project officer for the planned station, reacted with surprise Friday when told of the destruction. Schaeffer had originally been sympathetic to preservation plans, which met with less enthusiasm higher up in the Coast Guard.

The historic committee, in a letter Monday to Scherer, thanked the Coast Guard for the "reprieve," and lamented the loss of "the opportunity to work out a challenging compromise between the old and the new." (See Letters to the Editor, page 17.)

Josephine Del Deo, secretary of the historic committee, had worked particularly hard to save the building and was especially disappointed by its loss. She had received word last Wednesday that months of work had culminated in the Massachusetts Historic Commission's nomination of the trap shed to the federal board for inclusion in the National Registry.