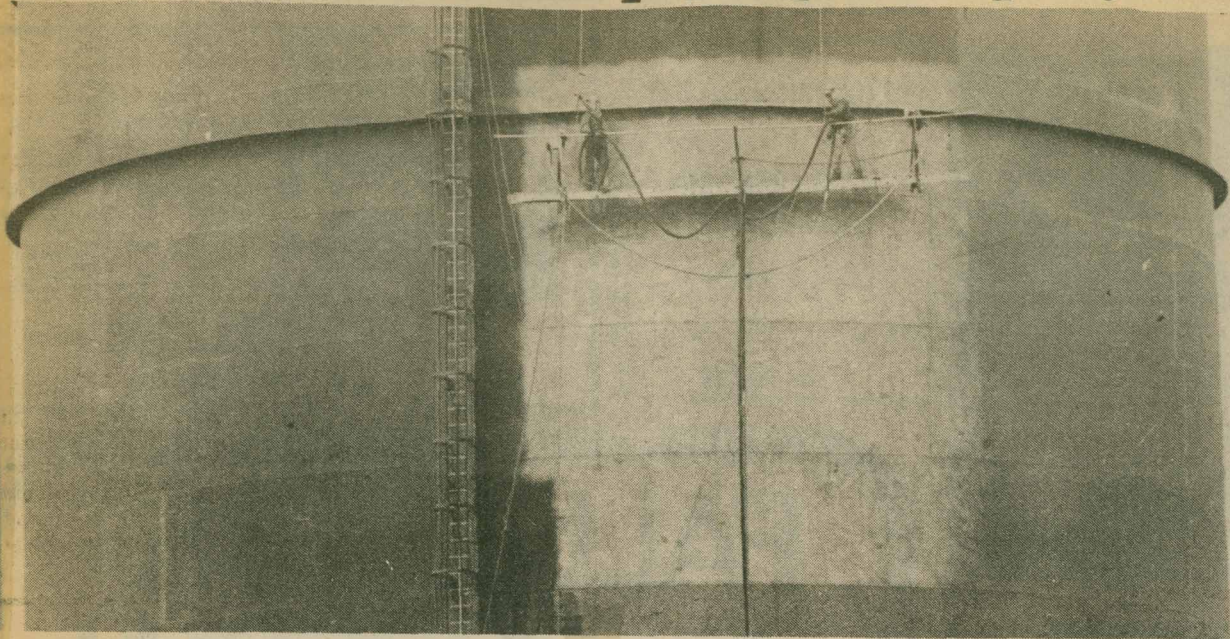


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Board halts standpipe paint project



Crews painting standpipe last week, before town stopped work

Advocate photo by Steven Schwadron

By Steven Schwadron

The Provincetown selectmen, exasperated by what they consider a comedy of errors in building the new water standpipe, shut down the project Monday pending a visit from the project supervisor next week.

The selectmen have been frustrated by apparent negligence in the layout, construction and landscaping around the standpipe. They ordered work stopped Monday after learning the contractor was painting the standpipe not only with a color different from the one the selectmen chose, but with rollers instead of brushes.

After long and arduous discussions over a period of several weeks and on the third ballot, the selectmen decided to paint the enormous new water tower a shade of light blue called Northern Sky. The board learned late last week that is not the color of the 175 gallons of paint waiting to be applied. The purchased paint, made by a different manufacturer, is a slightly bolder blue called Powder Blue.

Spokesmen for Whitman and Howard, the firm overseeing the \$1.8 million federally-financed improvements to the town's water distribution system, said Town Manager Charles Cobb authorized the color change two weeks ago. Cobb is out of town on vacation but his signature is on a document that appears to confirm this.

The color was changed, according to Whitman and Howard, because Northern Sky would not be available for six to eight weeks and would have delayed the project's completion that long. Cobb presumably selected the color he considered closest to Northern Sky on a color-chip chart from another manufacturer. He did not inform the selectmen of any change.

In addition, inquiries substantiated a complaint this week by Matt Costa, an abutter, that the contractor applied the primer coat incorrectly, with rollers instead of with brushes as the contract is said to require. Brushing on the paint leaves a thicker, more

even coat. Costa also complained that the contractor painted some of the primer while it was raining, despite provisions in the bid specifications for painting only in low humidity.

Costa has already had his share of problems with the standpipe project. He has complained to the selectmen for six weeks about the placement of a leaching pit on his property. This week, he also showed photographs of debris, mostly broken-up asphalt hardtop, apparently strewn by the contractor outside the protective fence surrounding the standpipe. That area was supposed to be planted with grass.

Furthermore, the selectmen have been waiting three-and-a-half months for an X-ray survey report of the standpipe's steel rings. Two of these huge rings fell inside the tower during a savage wind storm last year. Although no one was hurt, the board wanted proof the tower is still structurally sound. The board has also been annoyed by a bevy of large dents in the standpipe. The selectmen have been told these dents were a by-product of welding to relieve certain heat stresses.

"Why is it that Provincetown always has to get this kind of treatment?" Selectman Fred Ambrose asked last week. "We haven't even filled the standpipe yet and it already looks like a dented tin can."

When a bystander mentioned that it still wasn't too late to paint the standpipe more creatively—some residents wanted rainbows or flashy abstract designs—Ambrose said sardonically he thought the contractor had approached the job very creatively.

"It seems to be indicative of how a contractor does a job," Ambrose said yesterday, "that there's debris lying all around. It reflects the whole attitude toward the job and the town."

So far, the primer and an intermediary coat have been applied. The final coat has not yet been painted. Work was stopped Tuesday. Arthur Stockus, project supervisor for Whitman and Howard, is scheduled to discuss the job with the selectmen Monday night.

Both Ambrose and Selectman Mary-Jo Avellar, board chairman, said yesterday they were annoyed the paint color was changed with no input from the board. Avellar, inspecting the new color chart, said "that although she personally liked Powder Blue, another shade called Horizon Blue was closer to the selectmen's choice of Northern Sky.

The contractor told Ambrose that the color was very similar, Ambrose said, "but the differences shows up a little more on a 200-foot tower than it does on a color chip."

If the original color was not available, Ambrose said, then why were the selectmen asked to choose from that chart. Ambrose, himself a private contractor, said a firm taking on a construction job must follow specifications carefully.

"If someone wanted me to paint his house with purple and pink polka dots, I would do it," he said.