



Public Library in 1910 - Freeman Street, right

- July 15, 1976 -

Huge crane stops traffic

A huge crane trundled down Commercial Street early Monday morning, stopped in front of the Provincetown library, which is the process of a two-year renovation project, plucked a cupola off the second floor through a hole in the roof and set it in position.

It was a real happening. Grinning passersby stopped to gather around the red, white and blue Bicentennial crane and watch the operation. The crane stopped traffic from about 5 a.m. to noon.

Angie's, a sandwich shop across the street from the library, which should have been a little upset about having a billion-ton crane sitting practically on its doorstep, served free coffee and homemade cookies to the sidewalk superintendents.

Alice Joseph, the librarian, came by with a host of dignitaries, the library trustees, Town Manager Bob Killoran and Selectmen Chairman Bernese Shears. Her assistant, Dan Lewis, video taped the proceedings for the library's new visual history files. Alice, like a TV newsman, interviewed officials with a microphone as the camera recorded the event.

A real-life cameraman for Boston's TV Channel 5 took real-life news film that was aired this week.

The cupola, said Architect Daniel Sullivan, was on the original building when it was built 102 years ago as a private home. It was either removed or blew down, he said, but old pictures show what it looked like and it was recreated.

The cupola was built inside the library, which has been gutted. The large hole in the roof will be a skylight that will illuminate the center of the building down through the third floor mezzanine that will be built inside.

The cupola now sits at the edge of the front of the building overlooking Commercial Street and the magnificent honey locust tree in the front yard.

The \$250,000 library renovations will take two years to complete. The library has moved to the auditorium of the Town Hall until the library project is finished.

The crane was brought here not only to raise the cupola, Sullivan said, but to raise concrete sections of the roof of the masonry addition in back of the building.

The new addition will house an emergency fire exit and service areas for the library staff. When completed, the library will have new facilities for archives, film reading and a children's area with moveable stacks to make a small auditorium.

Faces and Places of the 1870's

ALONGSHORE.

BY JOHN BELL



Come to Light

from Under Library

Electrician Herman "Tiny" Rivard telephoned me some time ago. "You're interested in old things, I hear. There's a bunch of glass photo negatives in the crawl space under the library. I saw them when I was doing some rewiring."

Provincetown Librarian Mrs. Natalie Patrick readily gave permission to search. I went down into the boiler room in the old circular cellar under the library's front entrance. A hole in the brick wall let me climb into the 3-foot space between the loose sand and the first floor beams. My searchlight swept through curtains of cobwebs, and I used a stick to clear a passage through them.

Near the base of the chimney were a few glass plate negatives half buried in sand. All bore portrait images, scratched and dirty. In trying to blow the dirt off, I blew the gelatine emulsion off in tiny flakes. It would be impossible to make legible photo prints from these.

My searchlight showed there were piles of dusty things at the rear of the building, grouped around a closed door set in the brick foundation. On hands and knees, swinging my cobweb stick ahead of me, I worked my way back.

Halfway there, I came upon some glass bottles with narrow necks and flanged tops. One label read, "Anthony's Negative Collodion" and gave instructions for mixing it with silver nitrate and silver iodide. A larger green bottle read, "Nitric Acid, 7 lbs." Someone had dumped a photographer's empty bottles here.

Farther on, I found a cardboard disc with ten small holes punched in its rim. Printed in the center was "Merry Go Round, Independent Order of Good Templars, Provincetown, Mass. Filled and returned by—" and on a line below, the handwritten signature of G. Pinckney and the date, Oct. 17, 1888.

On a hunch, I tried fitting a disc into the hole. It dawned on me that when G. Pinckney had collected ten dimes the disc would carry a \$1 donation to the I.O.G.T. Near the disc was partial confirmation — a moldy set of "By-Laws of

Chequocket Lodge No. 76, I.O.G.T., Provincetown, Mass." The organization was a temperance society supported by members' donations.

A few days later, I re-entered the crawl space through the foundation doorway. This entrance obviously had not been used in years. The padlock's keyhole was clogged with paint, the hasp and staple fell off when I tried to cut the lock, and the hinges fell apart as I opened the door. Through the generations, the grass sod had thickened; it now stood six inches higher than the doorsill.

Clearing away the debris that blocked the doorway was like digging down through a buried city. Modern items on top, older ones below. Most recent were some 30-year-old electric lighting fixtures. Buried in sand were envelopes postmarked as early as 1884. The mess included sections of antique stair rail long ago replaced but "too good to throw to the dump."

Just beyond this clutter, now lighted by the open doorway, I found four boxes of glass negatives. Carted home, sorted, painstakingly cleaned with a camel's hair brush and printed, they are the source of the illustrations on this page.

Nine-tenths of the glass plates bear likenesses of lower Cape people long since gone, and 99% of those are unidentified. On a few of the plates the photographer pasted a tag and wrote the surname of his subject. Before I finish with those, I hope to search old town records and come up with the full names and approximate dates of the portraits.

The rest of the plates - precious few - show lower Cape scenes. Some obviously are of Provincetown. Some are marked "Wellfleet" by scratches in the emulsion. None are clearly identifiable Truro scenes. Just one can be dated before 1877—a view from Telegraph Hill shows the Town Hall that burned down in that year. But we know the photographer worked upstairs in the