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Wharf Theater Sags Into Harbor

February 16, 1940



Major casualty of the destructive storm that struck Provincetown this week was the Wharf Theater, shown above after the terrific gale had forced it to collapse into the harbor. The historic Summer playhouse was believed today to be a complete loss.

Wharf Theater Is Total Loss

No Insurance Carried, Bank Official Reports; Future Is Uncertain

PROVINCETOWN, Feb. 16 — As reports of additional property damage were received and a large force labored to restore traffic to normal, the future of historic Wharf Theater was the most absorbing topic of the storm's aftermath.

The shell of the large structure that has helped spread the fame of this town is standing but contractors who have viewed the building, consider it a total loss.

The Seamen's Savings Bank holds a mortgage on the property and Myrick Young, treasurer, said today that the loss from the storm damage was not covered by insurance.

The most poignant touch of the storm was the collapse of the Wharf Theater building at Provincetown. The strong gale that swept the tip of the Cape crushed the theater building, which sagged into the harbor, and is now considered a complete loss.

Provincetown citizens are especially concerned over the theater's future. Its long and illustrious history, studded with such names as Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Frank Shay, and the fact that it was the first Summer playhouse, make the theater's position in the drama world memorable.

But to present-day Provincetown the Wharf Theater represents something more tangible. It is a major Summer attraction, one which in recent years has brought many notables as performers. The theater also conducts a school for actors and actresses, which draws others to the town.

The Wharf Theater is as much a part of Provincetown history as the Pilgrims. Its loss would be a severe blow.

Despite the reports which indicate the building is beyond salvage, the town should make every effort to insure the continuance of the theater, either in its present location or in another. The town owes as much to itself and to history.

Further articles on the Wharf Theater will be found in articles around Gosnold Street, where the Provincetown Players reopened.



- June 15, 1967 -

MRS. MARY BICKNELL, who is one of the founders of the old Wharf Theater, recently observed her 94th birthday at the Cape End Manor. She is the widow of the late W. H. W. Bicknell, nationally known etcher. Mrs. Bicknell's lively mind is stored with memories of the great days when Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Sinclair Lewis and artists and writers who were to become famous were working here. It was in the 20's and the late Mary Heaton Vorse wrote about them in her book, "Time and The Town." Mrs. Vorse pointed out, incidentally that the friendliness and generosity of fishermen and townsfolk eased the way for many a gifted member of the art colony whose funds at the time ran far short of their talents.