

Historic wharf to be preserved

Coast Guard must keep

By Gregory Katz

The Coast Guard has been forced to keep Freeman's Wharf and will now have to build its modern prestressed concrete pier for its West End station next to the rickety 105-year-old wharf.

At a meeting Tuesday with the historical commission, the Coast Guard admitted it does not have the right to destroy the old pier, which is under consideration for inclusion in a nationally registered historic district.

The Coast Guard proposed to build its lengthy new pier on pilings to the west of Freeman's Wharf and to leave the old pier standing. Federal regulations state that the Coast Guard would then have to maintain the old pier and keep it from further deterioration.

Coast Guard Commander William Devereaux said after the meeting that Coast Guard officials will seek a further ruling from the U.S. Secretary of the Interior regarding the eligibility of the pier for protection. Devereaux said Coast Guard property lawyers will challenge the historicity of the pier. He conceded for now that the pier is protected and cannot be removed.

Margo Webber, environmental officer of the state historical commission, said she was satisfied with the new proposal. She said the commission feels strongly that the pier will continue to be protected. She said Freeman's Wharf would be ruled eligible as part of the nationally registered district and would be protected because it has historical value of its own.

The local historic district study committee was responsible for recommending that the structure be included in the National Register of Historic Places. This recommendation was made to the state historical commission at the same time the committee proposed creation of a local historic district in Provincetown, a controversial plan that was voted down at Town Meeting.

Because the old wharf is federally owned property under review for inclusion in an historic register, it is protected by executive order. The Coast Guard is forced to follow specific procedures if it wants to remove the pier. To remove the pier the Coast Guard must convince the federal

government to rule that the pier is not worthy of historic designation.

Freeman's Wharf was built in 1872 and supported a single-gauge railway used to run a fish-loading car and engine to the end of the pier. The pier uses old ship spars in its support system.

It was built by Francis Freeman to support his salt codfish and mackerel packing business and is one of two remaining old-style piers in Provincetown.

The Coast Guard has applied to the Army Corps of Engineers for permission to

build the pier, but the Army Corps refused to act until the controversy surrounding demolition of Freeman's Wharf was resolved. It had received letters from the Provincetown selectmen and the historical commission concerning the pier.

A local historian, George Bryant, selectman, said the Coast Guard was first informed of the status of the old pier in the spring of 1975. Although the town continued to alert the Coast Guard to the special status of the pier, the Coast Guard unveiled plans last summer calling for destruction of the pier.

Bryant said Tuesday after hearing of the new proposal that this is the first time in two-and-a-half years that the Coast Guard had acknowledged the historical importance of the site.

"They ignored federal law until now," Bryant said. "The structure was identified and made eligible by the historic district study committee and I think the town owes a great debt to that committee."

Before bringing its permit application before the Army Corps again, the Coast Guard must prepare responses to other criticisms raised about its plans. More than 40 West End residents sent a petition to

the Army Corps protesting that the plans to construct the new pier approximately 40 feet west of the old pier would drastically reduce use of the beach and boat moorings in the area. The selectmen also sent a letter to this effect.

The residents claim the Coast Guard misled them by repeatedly saying it would not do anything to restrict use of the beach. But Coast Guard Captain Leo Jordan has said the construction of the new pier would "clean up" the beach and increase access to it.

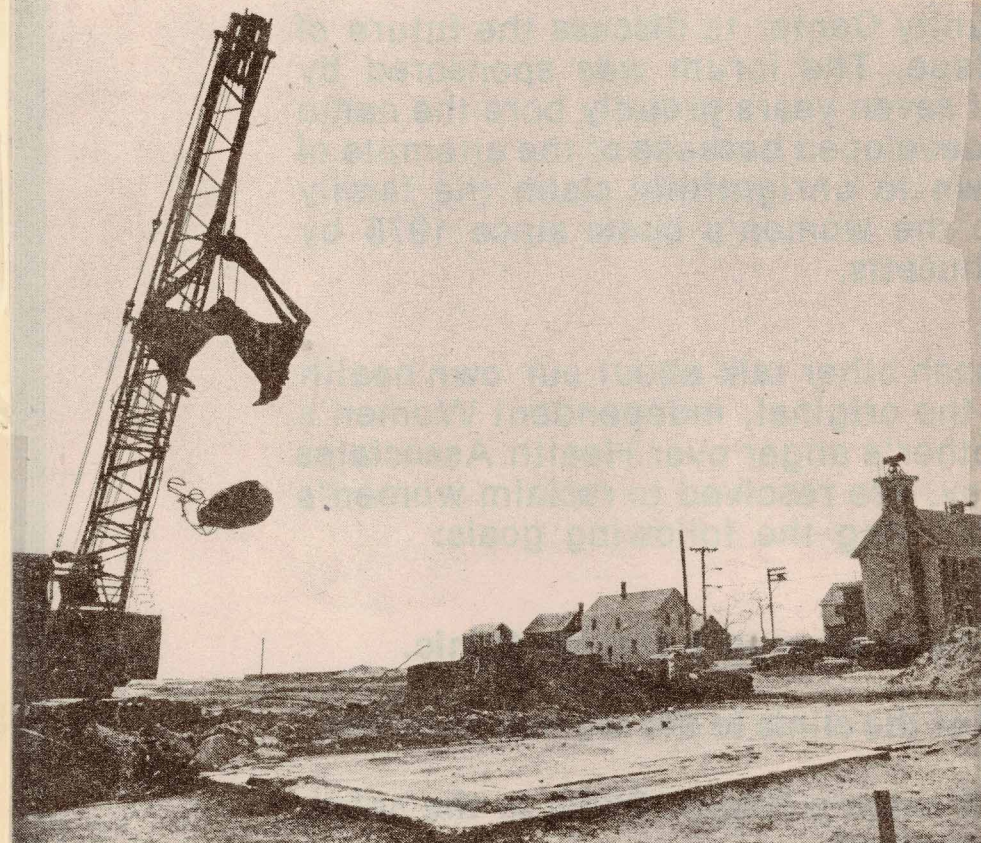
old wharf

Petition signers were upset that plans now call for two piers on the tiny beach that they have used for years and years. Yvonne Cabral, who started the petition, said the new plan is utterly ridiculous.

"I'm surprised the historical commission didn't invite us to the meeting, since they know we had a petition about it," Cabral said. "They seem to be more concerned with history than with people. I think it's terrible that people in Boston make decisions concerning Provincetown without even coming here to see the town."

Kenneth Jackson, chief of the processing section of the Army Corps, said the corps would probably be satisfied with the new proposal if it satisfied the historical commission. He said he could not estimate how long it would take before the Army Corps reached a final decision on the Coast Guard's request for permission to build a pier. Construction of the new station is still scheduled to begin in the spring.

Coast Guard station project now under construction



At work on new Coast Guard station

Advocate photo by Steven Schwadron

The Army Corps of Engineers gave the Coast Guard permission to build a new pier at the new Coast Guard station to be built in the West End.

The new pier will be built adjacent to Freeman's Wharf, a 109-year-old wharf the Coast Guard planned to demolish until the Massachusetts Historical Commission stepped in to save the structure.

Construction of the new station began this week. It should take 14 months to complete. A \$2.2 million contract to build the station was awarded to J.L. Marshall and Sons of Pawtucket, R.I.

The fate of the old wharf is still uncertain. No decision has yet been reached on whether the federal government will include it in the national register of historic landmarks. If it is not

included, the Coast Guard could demolish the wharf in the future.

A Coast Guard spokesman said Monday the new pier will be built in close to Freeman's Wharf to allow residents to use as much of the adjacent beach as possible. More than 40 West End residents signed a petition earlier this year complaining that the new pier would drastically restrict their use of the beach.

The spokesman said the Coast Guard had been unable to resolve local objections about eliminating boat moorings in the area. He said local boat owners who have moored in the area will have to move.

The new facility will include a barracks building, garage, warehouse, boat house and open-pile pier. Solar heating devices will be used.