

# Committee Wants Universalist Church Designated A Landmark



The Universalist Church of Provincetown, which the Restoration Committee of the Lower Cape wants to restore and have designated as a landmark. The photograph was taken around 1880.

The Restoration Committee of the Lower Cape is applying to have the First Universalist Church of Provincetown designated as a Massachusetts Historical Landmark and as a National Historical Landmark.

One application goes to the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the other to the Department of the Interior.

The committee, meanwhile, has requested the aid of the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities in preparing a brochure to raise funds "for a complete and permanent restoration of the church," according to Josiah Child, the Truro architect who is in charge of securing the land-

mark designations.

A major fund-raising drive, then, is expected to begin soon.

The church, completed in 1847, contains trompe d'oeil murals painted by Carl Wentz. The tower is considered by highly qualified architects to be one of the best examples of Greek revival architecture in New England.

The church's walls and ceilings were badly damaged by water when the church was being reroofed in 1938. A hurricane blew off the tar paper before the shingles had been applied, and water poured down, causing a great deal of damage.

The Restoration Committee met July 9 in Provincetown and

elected Joseph W. Acker president, Josiah Child vice president, John Bosworth secretary and treasurer, and Mrs. John C. Snow recording secretary.

Elected to the Board of

Directors were: Mrs. Carl Murchison, Mrs. Ross E. Moffett, Roslyn Garfield, Arthur Bickers, Dr. Daniel H. Hiebert, and Joseph Seaman, all of Provincetown, and Mrs. Arthur D. Daisy of Truro.

repair of the top, from which several cornice pieces have recently fallen. The finials are gone and we would be delighted if they could be returned by the finders. Fortunately, Charlotte Wilson retrieved two cornice pieces from the front yard.

With the generous help of mainly the people of this area, the Restoration Committee of the Lower Cape has collected enough money to insure the repair of the damaged interior mural; the base of the tower has been firmed up with steel; and a new roof has been added of long-life shingles.

The church has received a Federal allocation through the Mass. Historical Society, which had also helped out with the roof, of \$7,100 to repair the exterior of the tower; however, this will not be released until the church comes up with matching funds, and there is a time limit for this condition to be met. Unfortunately the church treasury was depleted of all available money to make up the matching funds for the new roof, and as the membership is very small with many not too active, the task of again raising matching funds seems almost overwhelming.

The money the Restoration Committee collected was specifically for the mural and legally must be saved for this purpose, so we must start a new ball game.

We had hoped to make the repair of the building a Bicentennial project of truly lasting value, and the Provincetown committee agreed, but Boston officialdom insisted that no federal money could be used on a church—which seems rather odd as money has already been received from the Interior Department through the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Father Duarte called the Universalist Church building the "Jewel of Provincetown, when he gave a personal donation to Joe Acker, chairman of the Restoration Committee, and there are many others of us who also get a lift when coming upon the handsome white church, with its tall tower serene in a green setting in the midst of downtown bustle. So here we are with a most extraordinary building kept open to the public, available for meetings, with a rare and fine organ, in danger of possible destruction by a "Sword of Damocles" tower, with resultant obliteration of the "trompe d'oeuil" mural—for the restoration of which so many have worked so hard. We need immediate help and will gratefully appreciate donations, ideas and physical help in raising money.

Larry Jones  
Chairman, Building Committee

## Provincetown Advocate, Thursday, November 13, 1975

### Save The Tower

To the Editor:  
Help save the tower!  
The disquieting news that approximately five feet of one of the four main supports of Provincetown's Universalist Church tower is punky with dry rot was confirmed by John Marshall of Truro, a statewide construction contractor who has been most helpful to the church in the past with his advice and experience. This tower should be saved as one of the most beautiful examples of Greek-revival archi-

ecture in this country. Furthermore, it is one of the last remaining church towers that have not been forced to be truncated due to damage from storm winds, lightning or neglect.

It has been determined that we must carefully cut out one half of the rotten 8 x 8 column, replace it with a 4 x 8, do the same to the other side, and then give it additional strength by through-bolting steel plates on either side. The tower also needs caulking of cracks, painting, replacing the missing corner finials, and the

November 3, 1977

## Restoration begins in April

Newly-elected officers and trustees of the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Provincetown will plan to start restoring the historic church structure by early April with the help of private donations, state and federal matching grants.

At an annual meeting, the congregation reelected Joseph Acker as moderator and Charlotte Wilson as treasurer. After Josephine Del Deo, church clerk for four years, asked not to be renominated, the church members elected Betty Steele to that position.

Also elected or reelected were: Lawrence Jones, co-chairman of the building and grounds committee; Thompson Moore, chairman of the finance committee, succeeding the late Jeff Bosworth; Charlotte Motta, chairman of the hospitality committee; Ralph Allison, chairman of the membership committee; and Adelaide Gregory, chairman of the music committee.

The new trustees later began plans for celebrating the church's 150th anniversary. It was founded in 1829 and the present building was completed in 1847. Part of that celebration involves restoring the building.

The Sandwich Glass chandelier, the clock and the silver communion service also date from 1847. The tracker organ, reputed to be the oldest working organ on Cape Cod, was installed in 1850.

But the most distinctive feature in the church is its unusual "Trompe L'Oeil," or "trick the eye" sanctuary interior, completed in the late 1840s.

Work on restoring the church foundations is scheduled to begin by April 4. Shortly thereafter, workers will start restoring the sanctuary interior.

The estimated cost of \$100,000 to \$150,000 will be covered partially by the Restoration Committee of Lower Cape Cod, an independent non-denominational group that has already raised \$60,000. Matching grants have been offered from the state historical commission and the federal Department of the Interior.