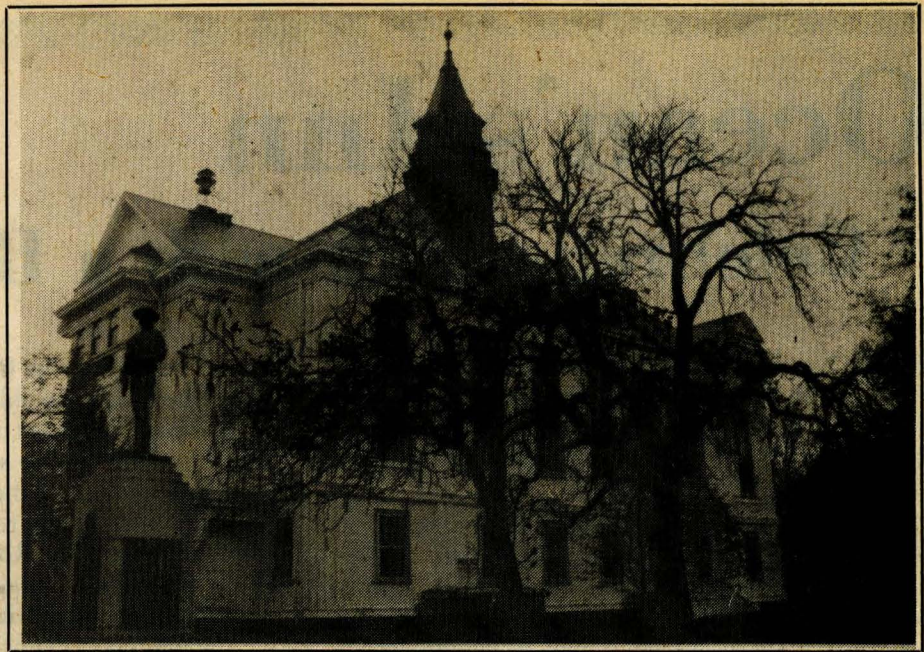


Provincetown Town Hall

Celebrates its 100th Year



Town Hall today

by Jan Kelly

(Provincetown) Birthdays are always a special occasion, but when it's a 100th birthday, it's extra special. There's something so round, so solid about the number 100. It's a century in a word. Imagine if you had to switch from writing 18— to 19— or when we will the switch from 1999 to 2,000. It will make your brain wag a little. Nobody could be immune to drifting and philosophical thought about the change.

This year, on August 25, 1986, our Town Hall will have its birthday, its 100th birthday. Construction started on September 10, 1885 and the dedication was on August 25, 1886—good timing! I would have thought it would have taken a longer period of time. They must have had a large labor force. The governor at the time, was named Robinson and he and many state officials were present for the dedication. The present Town Hall was erected to replace the Town Hall which burned on February 16th, 1877. It was atop High Pole Hill and could be spotted by fishermen a good way out to sea. But this location and the fact that it was built of hard pine made it difficult for the firemen to save. The cause of the fire was never known.

The new Town Hall, for several reasons, was built in the center of town. Losing one Town Hall by fire taught the location lesson well. Also, the present Town Hall is within a reasonable distance of all town folks. The land was the homestead of Reverend William Henry Ryder and the Town Fathers took the other two pieces by eminent domain. Ryder paid the total bill. The cost of construction was \$50,400. It was a big bill for Provincetown of 1886. Bigger still because the high school was contained in the old Town Hall and provisions had to be made for that project. The architect was John Fox of Boston and William Jobling was the contractor. There was a building committee of eight knowledgeable townspeople to oversee the enterprise. When finished, it was the pride of Provincetown and much admired by the rest of the Cape. Steam heat, gas

lighting, stage and scenery, large, airy and well-equipped offices, seating capacity for 1,000 in the hall and a fine chiming clock were some of the features that distinguished our Town Hall in 1886 and still do in 1986. We have all had good times there at plays, musicals, dances, Portuguese Night, roller skating, (yes, it was used as an indoor rink), square dancing and of course, the First Annual Year Rounders Festival of February 8th, 1986. We've also had memorials and plaques, town meetings of fire and ice, and many sad trials in the Judge Welch Hearing Room. It was our local courtroom with Judge Welch presiding and John Agna clerking before the move to Orleans. Lots of rhetoric in Town Hall, lots of arguing, lots of solution searching, the open forum where all and any citizen can speak his or her thoughts.

It is probably the most-used building in town. So many town officials have their offices there and the police station is still there, though it will be moving after a 100-year residency. Any organized group can meet there if it gains permission. There is probably no one in town who has never been in Town Hall. There are some who wish they didn't have to be there so much. Births, marriages, and deaths are registered there. You pay your taxes there, pick up your licenses and permits there, you vote there, you go to Town Meeting there, you go to selectmen's meetings there, you fight with the assessor there and ask permission to change your own property there. You cooperate there, you protest there, but for one reason or another you use the Town Hall—3 levels of it, police, town offices, public meetings. I think we could now give Town Hall a day to itself, its 100th birthday. Let's decorate her and have a party. We could have it all summer or from Blessing of the Fleet to New Year's Eve if you like, but, let's do something. On August 25, 1986, our good old reliable Town Hall will be 100. Let's do something special, but let's not paint her gold again.