

Letters to the Editor
PROVINCETOWN BANNER
167 Commercial St.
Provincetown, MA 02657

July 18, 1999

At this year's annual town meeting, the people voted to leave the "Rose Dorothea" in place in the Heritage Museum after an emotional and strongly expressed appeal by Captain Francis "Flyer" Santos who spent eleven years of his life building this beautiful half-scale model of the town's most famous fishing schooner. The voters said by their vote, contrary to the opinion of most of the selectmen and other town officials, that the "Rose" must stay where she was. The voters also assumed that the museum operation would continue, because funds had already been appropriated to make needed repairs to the Heritage Museum and this approval had initiated a funding grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission as well. I believe the voters did not realize that plans were afoot to sidetrack the museum operation for the 1999 season based on the projected repairs in spite of the fact that no firm implementation of the work had been initiated. This closure of the building further weakened the museum's position as to income and further jeopardized her credibility as a viable resource for the community, and thus added to the erroneous attacks on that credibility which have been continuous for years and without foundation.

Short of any structurally dangerous condition, I am not convinced the building cannot be opened, even now, with the usual precautions concerning ongoing improvements in case they are begun. I understand there have been delays in implementing the job, and I don't see why this should be the case or why the chairman of the Board of Trustees and the town manager haven't seen to it that the work was implemented. The building could still be opened now and half the season salvaged, since it appears the actual work of repair is still a long way off. I can't help thinking that something "funny" is going on here, and why haven't there been more demands from the public for the work to be postponed until October when the museum is closed and its earning capacity not an issue.

During the period when my wife and I served on the Board of Trustees of the Heritage Museum, two physical engineers were hired at various times, one at the beginning of our efforts to build the "Rose" and later in 1989-'90 when the repair of the entire east side from the second floor ~~span~~ to the sills was undertaken. This latter job was successfully completed and that side of the building is in better shape than it has ever been since the original construction. The trustees addressed the support columns in the basement on two occasions and several new piers were added and old ones brought up to structural bearing weight which had been made nonfunctional due to ^{WALTER} Chrysler's disruption of the basement area to create vaults which he never used due to conditions of dampness. The fact is that "Flyer", during the building process of the "Rose Dorothea", maintained a marker to register movement in the building, and from one year to the next, there was no sagging or shifting of the building to the slightest degree. Ask him.

Some people have criticized the museum for removing the central ceiling of the sanctuary in order to provide space for the masts of the "Rose." As your July 1, 1999 issue shows on page 15, Walter Chrysler had already driven two by fours into that stenciled ceiling to provide storage space for his art work long before the town acquired the building. The ceiling was, thereby, totally ruined already. The board's plan was to save the mezzanine stencils with the help of a preservation grant and to place appropriate period exhibits pertaining to the fishing industry and the community of the 19th and early 20th century on the mezzanine from which area, the visitor could look down on the "Rose Dorothea" and have a spectacular perspective of the model. This idea was conceptualized for us by Harvey Dodd in two watercolors donated to the museum.

In addition to the damage Chrysler did to the ceiling stencils (a stencil, by the way, is not the same thing as a fresco), he removed a priceless tracker organ and took it to the dump in pieces, so that nothing could be done to retrieve it, even by several people who tried hard to save it. The stained glass windows of the original church building were also removed, as has been pointed out, and the only remaining example is in the museum today, having been saved by Mr. Gonsalves and given to the town.

I mention these things simply to set the record straight. In

In more than fifteen years of devoted attention to the restoration, upkeep and running of the Heritage Museum, my wife Josephine and I, together with many other dedicated members who served on the Board of Trustees and the volunteers, managed to bring the building back to life in a hundred different ways, from essential repair to ongoing maintenance, to the collection of a vastly diverse and important collection for the ⁱⁿ town. Among these artifacts is an art collection that rivals many a larger and better-staffed museum. The works of art that Josephine and I ~~solicited and~~ collected on behalf of the town over the years, totaled 199 in 1994. That figure may well be more at this writing. Today, as witnessed by the recent show at the Fine Arts Work Center, this is a priceless heritage. In the FAWC exhibit, 11 of the 16 paintings shown were part of the Heritage Museum collection. Ten of these were collected by us, and, of course, without our efforts, none of them would have been in place today. What happens, by the way, to these wonderful examples of the art of our famous art colony if the museum is disassembled or voted out of existence? Do all these treasures, as was the case with Mr. Chrysler, leave our community, scattered to the four winds, after having been promised to be kept in perpetuity? This is an unthinkable betrayal of the trust of the donors, all of whom were assured that their personal artifacts would be honored and preserved by the town. Walter Chrysler promised his donors the same thing, that they would be a legacy for Provincetown. Instead, as he breezed out of town, he took a very significant art collection, which he garnered here at a modest investment, plus a priceless Sandwich Glass collection, with him.

The Provincetown Heritage Museum represents a tremendous asset to this community. It was created by people who believed the town had a history that should be preserved for future generations and the world at large. That is still the case. Let us go back to basics. The Heritage Museum should be the Heritage Museum. The current ideas that have been proposed for the museum are all flawed. The concept of a theater has been tried there and failed. The town's purchase of the building resulted from this failed endeavor which was then the Center for the Arts. The investors and promoters went bankrupt. Any future which is predicated on private investment and ownership runs the distinct risk of another such failure or defection, and the

and then we are back to square one again- our magnificent 4.
and symbolic landmark in total jeopardy. Who will wish to rescue
it a second time if the town has so failed to support it this time
around. Don't forget, it is a National Registered Landmark under
long-term preservation covenant no matter who owns the building.

Again, let me say that if the town fathers and the town manager
and various boards got together to help the museum, I am convinced
it would become what we envisioned. Some suggestions for helping the
process are:

1. Create an incentive to visit the museum by offering free
parking or reduced rates at the town-owned lots if people
show they have visited the museum.
2. Use the cement block addition to the property on the east
side of the building for a modest, coffee & pastry bar
concession, thus improving revenue-
3. Continue and augment the special exhibits and events
already successfully pursued -
4. Add to the fishing and other historical exhibits that com-
plement the "Rose Dorothea" on the mezzanines as suggested
previously in this letter-
5. Consider a full trap boat exhibit of some nature and
restore the "Charlotte" again if possible-
6. Combine the Fire Department artifacts as a part of the
Johnson St. station when and if that station is closed as
an operating fire house.
7. Immediately establish an active Friends of the Museum such
as functioned as the Provincetown Historical Association
which raised all the money to build the "Rose Dorothea."

As to moving the "Rose," why can't some people accept the ex-
planation that Capt Santos and others have presented, that it would be
absolutely impossible and a physical and spiritual catastrophe. You
can't "play around" with objects that become icons. The "Rose Dorothea"
is an icon; it is the centerpiece and symbol of our rich historic past,
a past which the Provincetown Heritage Museum is preserving for future
generations.

Salvatore Del Deo