

Fire ravages 4 irreplaceable downtown buildings

Handcrafter, Whaler's Wharf destroyed Crown & Anchor may become total loss as well

Marine Specialties heavily damaged

By Marilyn Miller

Fire destroyed two of Provincetown's historic Commercial Street buildings Tuesday night, and left two other buildings virtual shells, lighting up the sky with a churning fireball that could be seen for miles away, spewing a blizzard of burning embers that swirled in the night sky and set fire to bushes a quarter of a mile away.

"This is a hell of a fire," said Provincetown Deputy Fire Chief Warren G. Alexander, who went to a five-alarm fire, calling in 30 pieces of equipment and up to 300 firemen from 10 Cape towns to help fight the blaze.

The fire broke out at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday in Whaler's Wharf, setting off a vicious, uncontrollable blaze, destroying the old movie theater now converted to shops. It quickly engulfed the Handcrafter building attached to it.

Then the Crown & Anchor Motor Inn, a stately wooden three-story hotel built in the mid-1800s in the Greek revival style, burst into flames. It also spread to the west, destroying a wall and the roof of Marine Specialties.

Firemen did not start packing up their gear until close to 5 a.m. yesterday. Later yesterday, bulldozers were expected to tear down the facades of the buildings.

"I hate to think that they're going to tear down the brick front of Whaler's Wharf," said Joe Notaro, district fire chief, at 8 a.m. yesterday. Built in 1919, Whaler's Wharf, now an enclosed mall with a dozen shops, once housed the town's first movie theater.

"Whaler's Wharf and the Handcrafter are definitely lost and the Crown might be totally lost too," Alexander said early Wednesday more than six hours after the fire started. "We've knocked it down, but it's not out yet.

"We'll be here for hours. I've never seen anything

like this. There were embers as big as baseballs."

Fireman Andy Green, at 5 a.m. yesterday, said he knew of no casualties from the fire. "The Crown could possibly be restored," he said, "but you're talking about a lot of money."

Gwen Bloomingdale and Barbara Gard were in their Cessna Cardinal returning from Beverly when

they saw what appeared to be a fog bank over Provincetown.

"It was clear beautiful night so a fog bank shouldn't have been there," Bloomingdale said. "We looked down toward the Monument and we saw this blaze. It was just leaping into the air. We were 13 miles out

Continued on page 32



Advocate photos by Duane A. Steele

Back of the Crown & Anchor collapses as fire devastates interior

Fire ravages 4 irreplaceable downtown buildings

Structural engineer on way to see if Whaler's Wharf facade can be saved

Continued from page 1

and didn't know if it was the pier, Town Hall or what. "But then we flew around it a couple of times and could see that the entire Whaler's Wharf was engulfed. Flames were shooting all over. From the air we could see it so vividly, that criss-cross of burning embers. We could see the rafters. It was unbelievable, as if the building opened up and you could look right down the roof. We were speechless.

"The heart's been yanked out of Provincetown," she said. "When a tourist comes to town, he takes his children to buy one shell each at Whaler's Wharf, then they go to watch the drag queens at the Crown. What else do you do in Provincetown? It's like the heart has just been yanked out. It's not the same without these buildings."

Orleans Fire Chief Raphael Merrill, a Provincetown native, watched as firemen tried to drench the fire within Whaler's Wharf.

"I used to go to the movies there," he said. "It's the space that's between these buildings that saved the town from other buildings being involved. We've got men from Harwich, Brewster and Wellfleet who are in the Crown on the second and third floors now, trying to work their way back.

"The guys are doing a great job containing this to four buildings."

But those men brave were beaten back by the heat and flames, Alexander said. One Orleans firefighter was led to the rescue truck by Provincetown Patrol-

man Glenn Enos for treatment for smoke inhalation. This fireman was able to walk to the truck on his own. Alexander said he was not aware of any injuries.

Dale Elmer, owner of Whaler's Wharf, who lived above the Handcrafter, was in Arizona when the fire broke out. Kenneth Lemon, owner of the Crown, was in Florida.

Rodney Reetz, manager of the Crown, said he was able to clear the building of all people after a man came running in, warning that there was a big fire next door.

"He said You'd better watch out, so I made everyone go out and I locked the doors."

He sagged at about 7:30 p.m. as he stood on the beach behind the Crown and watched the third floor porch twist in the flames and collapse.

"I feel sick," he said. "There goes a lot of memories."

The State Fire Marshal was called in "to try to pin down what happened," Alexander said. "I understand someone was inside the building and he may know something about that.."

Dave Bragdon, Whaler's Wharf night watchman, said he was in the building when he smelled smoke and realized there was a fire.

"I know what happened," he said. "I ran in, smelled smoke, but I got here too late. The fire was around the corner in the Whaler's Wharf side of the building. I tried to smother it with blankets, but it didn't work. I went to get water, but when I got back, the fire was

already out of control."

Several firemen said they heard an explosion in Whaler's Wharf. "Since there are many artisans in there and lot of them use torches, it's possible there was an explosion," Alexander said.

Truro Patrolman Chris Burrell was stationed on Bradford and Alden Street to keep cars from approaching the fire area. "I knew there was a fire, but I had no idea of the extent of it until I saw it as I came down from High Head on Route 6. Its was incredible, a big ball of fire."

Merrill said as he drove down the highway, "It looked as if the whole town was burning. It was quite a sight."

Ed Polay, owner of the Little Store, watched from the beach as the fire raged and tore apart the Crown, creating a wind of its own that filled the air with dancing, burning embers. His store seemed to be safe, he said.

"We seem to be okay, by the grace of God. But if the wind had been blowing the other way, everything through to Seaman's Bank would have been gone."

Bloomington said she and Gard half expected to find their Commercial Street shop in flames by the time they landed their plane and drove to town.

It wasn't. "It's amazing that they contained the fire, absolutely amazing," she said. "The fact that there was no wind helped. If there had been a normal winter wind here, 20 to 30 knots, we wouldn't have our shop or a town."

Cape Firefighters converge on Provincetown

Mutual aid system kicks into high gear to contain disaster

By Ed Bilodeau

More than 36 pieces of equipment and well over 100 firefighters and rescue workers from 10 Cape communities supplemented the Provincetown Fire Department in putting down the fire Tuesday night that everyone was afraid would happen someday.

The county mutual aid system kicked into high gear to send help to beleaguered Provincetown. Towns from Truro to Barnstable sent firefighters, rescue personnel and equipment rumbling down Route 6 to battle a blaze that could have consumed the whole downtown.

The remaining Cape communities were also mobilized as the mutual aid system began shuffling equipment down the Cape to cover towns who had stretched their local thin by sending aid to Provincetown. A task force from Plymouth was dispatched to Barnstable to cover for the seven Lower Cape towns whose equipment and men were racing to save Provincetown.

The fire was bigger and required more help than the three-alarm fire that gutted the Maushope elderly housing complex in November, 1996. As a result of that fire, three people died, some days later from the shock and the trauma.

Truro sent five pieces of equipment — three engines, an ambulance and the chief's car — to Provincetown along with 12 to 15 firefighters. Truro had firefighters and equipment from Dennis, Centerville, Osterville and Yarmouth covering Truro during the emergency.

The Wellfleet dispatcher was unsure of how many persons or pieces of equipment were sent to Provincetown, but that Wellfleet sent a rescue truck, two pumps and a ladder to the Maushope fire along with 14 firefighters.

Wellfleet Fire Chief Alan Hight had a busman's holiday as he cut short his vacation to be in Provincetown to hold the reins of his department Tuesday night. Wellfleet Selectman Jeffrey White was also on hand to watch his fire department in action.

"I was on my way to Orleans when I heard about the fire," he said.

White said he saw fire trucks heading toward Provincetown and was told about the fire when he went into a store. White almost regretted his vote last week to rescind the board's earlier vote to approve the fire department's proposed budget for next year until it can be more closely scrutinized. When told the department would do the town proud and he would feel guilty about the vote, White agreed.

"I was thinking that myself on the way down here," he said.



Handcrafter is engulfed soon after onset of fire and is now moving fast into Crown & Anchor

Units from West Barnstable and Dennis covered the Wellfleet station during the fire. Eastham had two engines in Provincetown. When contacted at about 1 a.m., engines from Brewster and Barnstable were covering Eastham. Hyannis was also there earlier.

Orleans sent two engines and a ladder to Provincetown. Centerville and Osterville covered for Orleans.

Harwich contributed two engines, a ladder, a rescue unit and an air trailer, along with 15 men. Hyannis and Cotuit covered Harwich.

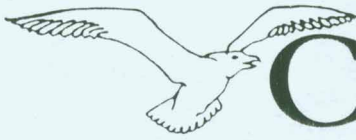
Brewster was on hand with three rescue units and four engines. Chatham sent 10 people to man two fire engines and a rescue vehicle. Chatham's call

firefighters were able to cover the Chatham station.

Dennis sent its ladder truck and four engines to Provincetown. Centerville and Osterville provided coverage in Dennis. Yarmouth emptied its firehouse to send a rescue truck, a ladder truck and four engines to Provincetown. Falmouth and Sandwich sent equipment and men to cover Yarmouth.

Barnstable had a ladder in Provincetown as well as two engines at Harwich and Eastham for station coverage. County dispatch, the nerve center of the mutual aid system, could not provide Tuesday night totals of the equipment and manpower mobilized for the fire.

"I'm really busy right now," said the dispatcher. "We're still in the middle of it."



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SPORTS

Celtics beaten by Nuggets /C-1

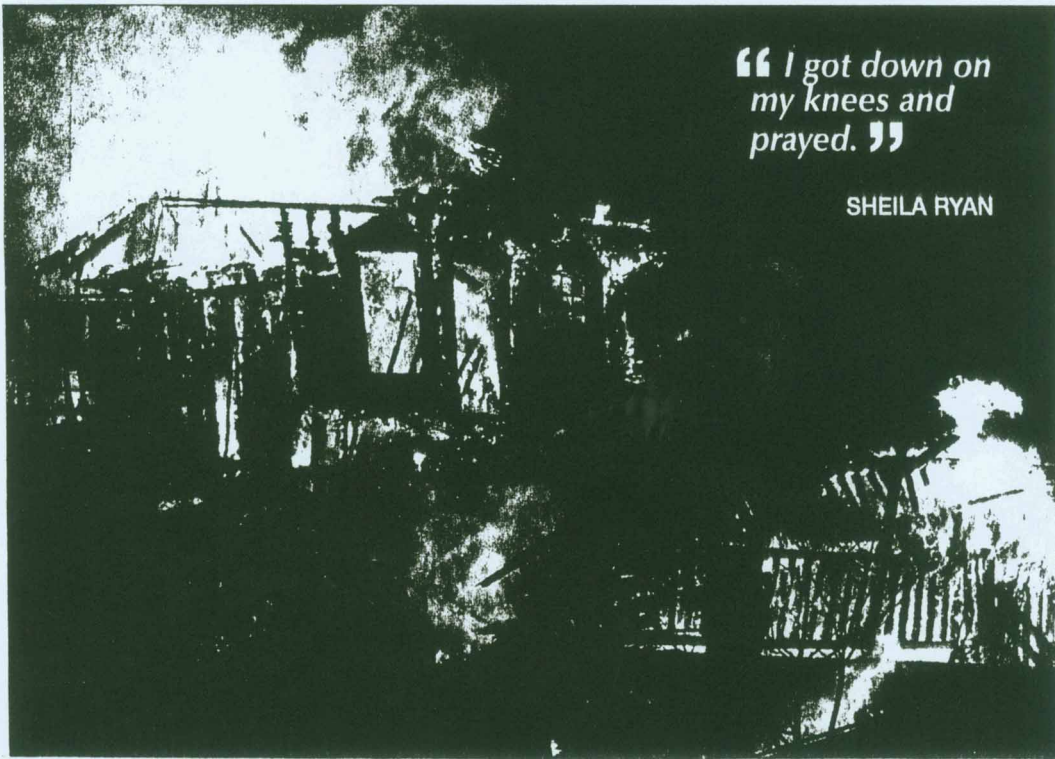
- UMass tops Duquesne
- UConn women lose

The Main Squeeze

■ Lemons bring a welcome freshness to winter menus /B-1

Fire tears at Provincetown's heart

■ The back of the Crown and Anchor burns furiously last night in spite of efforts by firefighters from Provincetown and nearby towns.



“ I got down on my knees and prayed. ”

SHEILA RYAN

Historic inn, retail mall fall victim to windswept flames

By K.C. MYERS
STAFF WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — A five-alarm fire tore through the central block of Provincetown last night, leveling the historic Crown & Anchor Motor Inn and the Whaler's Wharf Mall.

Marine Specialties, the Army surplus store at 235 Commercial St., sustained heavy roof and attic damage but was still standing last

night.

Despite the extensive property damage and about 100 firefighters battling the flames, no major injuries were reported.

Twenty-eight engines and several ladder trucks from Mid- and Lower Cape fire departments worked the blaze or stood ready.

All the businesses inside the Whaler's Wharf Mall were closed

Please see **BLAZE** /A-7



Times Photos by VINCE GUADAZNO

■ Spectators watch the Crown and Anchor burn from the beach behind the building.

BLAZE

Continued from A-1

at the time of the fire, as was Marine Specialties. The Crown & Anchor, which normally has a bar open this time of year, was closed for renovations, said Peter Spinicelli, an employee.

During the fire's peak from 6:30 to about 8 p.m., hot burning embers ignited at least one brush fire on the hill next to the Pilgrim Monument.

In North Truro cars pulled over on the side of Route 6A at Pilgrim Heights to watch the spectacle of the town ablaze.

Fire trucks from as far away as Hyannis were on the scene.

The fire was reported at 6:15 p.m. by David Bragdon, the night caretaker for the Whaler's Wharf Mall. About 11:30 last night Provincetown police found Bragdon and planned to interview him.

"I smelled something just as I was coming inside, and then I saw the flames," Bragdon told the Times earlier.

He said he grabbed three blankets and put them on the fire. He

went to get some water to put on the blankets, but when he got back and saw the blankets engulfed, he knew it was too late.

"It must have been an electrical short," he said. "I had the place locked up, so no one could get in."

He said Dale Elmer, the mall's owner, was out of town.

By 11:30 last night firefighters

were still working to contain the hot spots in the rubble.

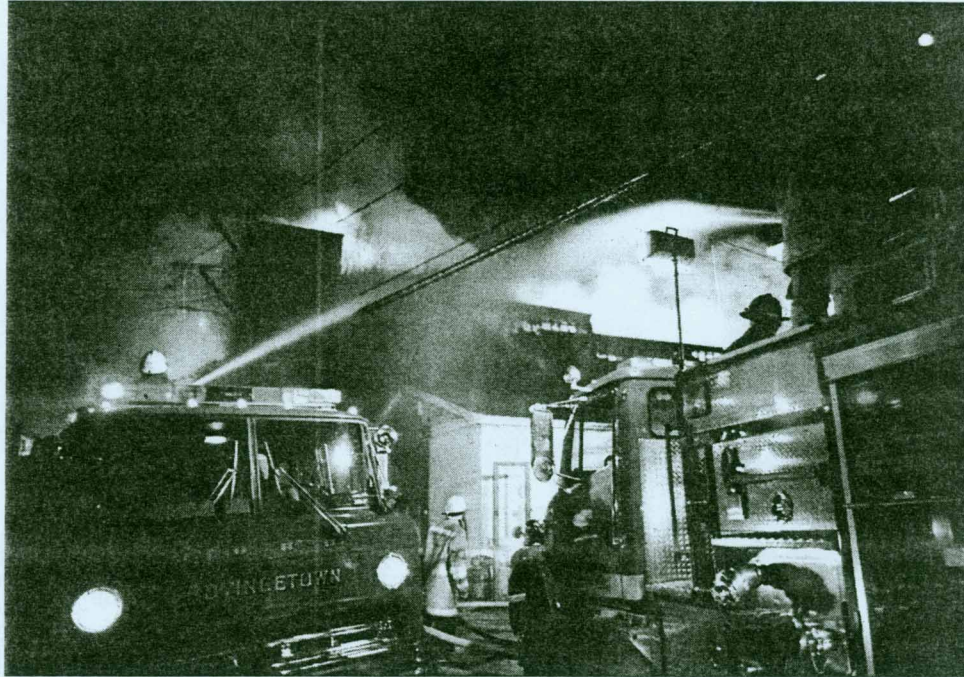
It appears the fire started in the Whaler's Wharf building. Before the firefighters could turn the water on, flames were shooting out the roof of the mall, said Provincetown firefighter-Lorne Russell.

"The buildings were fully involved when we got there, so we knew we had nothing to work with," said Russell. "We're basically just trying to protect the exposure and keep it from

spreading."

The Hyannis Fire Department put out the brush fire near the monument, while most manpower was concentrated in the Commercial Street area. Hoses pumping about 1,000 gallons of water a minute soaked all the surrounding buildings, including the historic

At 7:30 p.m. hundreds of spectators on the bay beach were warmed by the glow of the flames. They watched as the upper deck of the Crown & Anchor collapsed.



Times Photo by VINCE GUADAZNO

■ Provincetown firefighters douse burning buildings on Commercial Street last night. The Crown and Anchor Motor Inn, Whaler's Wharf Mall, the Handcrafter and Marine Specialties all were damaged.

Unitarian Church.

Once flames reached through the roof of the mall, wind blew them to the Crown & Anchor, at 247 Commercial St., and flames quickly devoured the eastern and back, or bay, sides of the inn.

At 7:30 p.m. hundreds of spectators on the bay beach were warmed by the glow of the flames. They watched as the upper deck of the Crown & Anchor collapsed in a canopy of fire.

Billy Jean, who works as a

female impersonator at the Crown, said "That's my whole career going up in flames."

"I'm stunned more than anything," said Tish deWilliams, another female impersonator.

Both men planned to do acts

this weekend and said they lost many costumes.

The owner of the Crown & Anchor, Kenneth Lemon, was in Florida last night.

Michael Trovato, Provincetown's fire chief, was also out of town.

"We could have used him tonight," Provincetown firefighter Mike Smith said.

Smith was one of the first to respond. He said he attacked the fire from the alley between Marine Specialties and the Whaler's Wharf Mall. By 8 p.m., exhaustion forced him to stop. "I hate it when there are fires down here," he said. "The whole town could go up."

He said Provincetown's volunteer firefighters did an amazing job. Each is paid a stipend of \$450 a year.

"We earned it tonight," he said.

While the commercial loss is huge — the Crown & Anchor employs about 50 people in the summer, and the Whaler's Wharf contains several retail stores — there were some lucky breaks.

When wind swept flames across the Crown & Anchor and it looked as though the fire might reach the Julie Heller Gallery, spectators on Commercial Street started grabbing the artwork out of the gallery.

In a matter of minutes the small gallery was empty, and the works of Provincetown's old and new artists were safe in town hall. As it turned out, the fire never reached the gallery. "Millions of people came and took my art out," Heller said. "It was fabulous, just fabulous."

Volunteer firemen drop everything when alarm sounds

By Marilyn Miller

Provincetown Deputy Fire Chief Warren G. Alexander was on vacation from his job as building commissioner when the fire tone sounded at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday.

He and his girlfriend, Candi McDonald, had just welcomed Ray Sparks and Bill Ingraham, retired wiring inspector, into their home for a baked ham dinner.

"Bill and Ray didn't even have time to take their coats off when the fire tone sounded," McDonald said.

Alexander was out of the house in seconds. With Fire Chief Michael Trovato on vacation in Florida, he was in charge of containing perhaps the biggest fire in the town's history.

"I went to a five alarm," he said. "I'd guess we had close to 300 people here, including Provincetown's 50 firefighters."

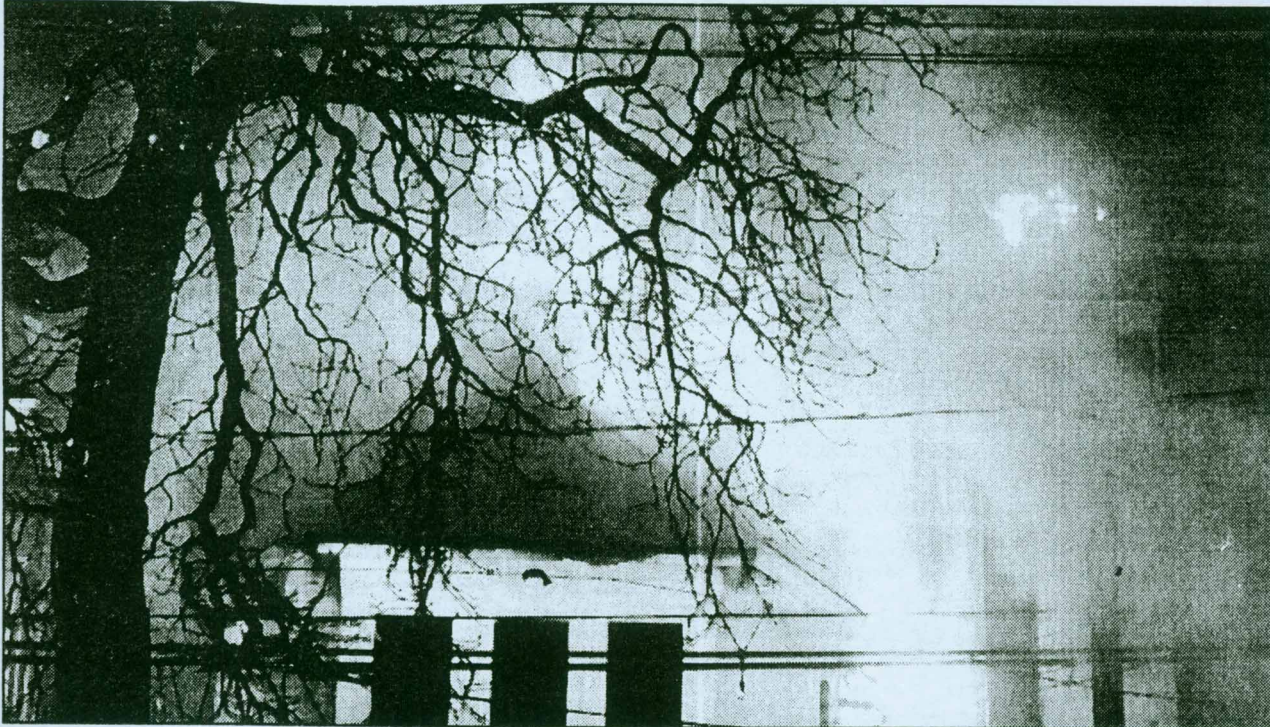
One of those 50, Mark Lambrou, was getting ready to eat when he heard the tone. "I drove Engine No. 1 down there with Paul Silva and we went right to the Handcrafter," he said.

"This guy was outside waving us in. We didn't see anything except a little smoke when we got there, but then we went around the side and saw all the flames so we pulled the truck out to get it out of the way. It would have caught on fire if we didn't," he said.

"There were flames everywhere, and then it like exploded, did a poof, and the whole building was on fire. It was real fast. There's all sorts of flammable stuff in there, gas and things like that, and the whole building just went up right in front of my eyes.

"It started to spread to the front of the Handcrafter and you could see the flames."

Continued to page 30



Fire turns night into day from lawn of Universalist Church

Volunteer firemen

Continued from page 1

Fireman Mike Smith was also one of the first to respond to the tone. "Glenn White and I were on the roof at Marine Specialties right at the beginning of the fire. Then I ended up between the old theater and Marine Specialties when one of the propane gas tanks went off. I was there for an hour and a half until I took so much heat and fire and had a section of the wall come in on me, that I had to back out and get out of there. We kind of prevented Marine Specialties from as much damage as could have happened.

"We had one of those smaller inch-and-a-quarter lines there. I myself handled the fire pretty much alone for an hour and a half. Fires are wicked when you're handling one alone."

Smith said he and White, armed only with one of the smaller hose lines, didn't have much impact on fighting the fire at first. "We took a defensive stand until we got mutual aid," he said. "It came very quickly, which was terrific. Warren Called for mutual aid right away and the response was great from the other companies.

"Provincetown did a great job keeping the fire from spreading. We had brush fires in other areas of town, and I'm really glad we were able to keep it under control."

Alexander said a blizzard of burning embers threatened to set fire to other buildings nearby, including the Universalist-Unitarian Meeting House, another irreplaceable historic structure. One ember went down a flue in the chimney of The Advocate Building, touching off a fire that was quenched by Patrolman Marty Menangas. Unidentified neighbors from Gabriel's Guest House hosed down the roof to protect it from the embers.

"I never saw anything like it before," Alexander said. "The embers were as big as baseballs."

Wellfleet Fire Lt. Wayne DeForest stood on Bradford Street., directing fire trucks from Dennis, Chatham and Brewster into Duarte's parking lot.

"We're trying to get this equipment put away," he said. "We're trying to put all of our resources into this parking lot, which we're using as a staging area. We had three fires going at the same time since this started two brush fires, one at the monument and another at the Cape End Manor," he said.

"This is a five-alarm fire, something you won't see for many years."

Barbara McGinley, charge nurse at the Cape End Manor, said she called the fire department at 7:10 PM. to report a grass fire at Motta Field.

"There was no fire at the manor," she said. "I know what happened, though. Dick Silva, head of maintenance, came by to check on things. He told me to call the police about the fire at the ballfield. I called and said I was one of the charge nurses at the manor and I guess they thought the fire was here."

McGinley said when she looked up in the sky, saw it filled with brightly glowing red embers, her first impression was that fireworks were going off.

"I was going to go in and get all the staff and patients to see the fireworks," she said. "I thought it was fireworks and with the full moon, I thought let's get them out in their coats to see this."

Dennis Fire Capt. John Donlan stood on Bradford Street near the staging area with his fire truck. "It's been a long time since I've been here," he said. "The last time was the Pilgrim House fire right here on Bradford. We've got two trucks here from Dennis, and everyone from the Cape is here."

Jon Watson spent more than six hours standing beside Pumper 5, which was parked in front of the Advocate Building at Bradford and Winslow Streets, feeding water from the hydrant into lines running to the fire scene.

At 7:15, when the sky seemed to explode with fat embers, a gentle rain started to fall, but it was only spray from the millions of gallons of water being heaped on the fire.

"It would be wonderful if it turned into a down-pour," said Randy Godfrey, rescue worker.

Fire hoses connected to hydrants, coiled like snakes on Commercial Street, posing a tripping hazard to those who walked with their eyes on the fire, not the street.

Joel Macara, fireman and rescue worker, turned in his beeper for another battery. "It used to work, but not any more because it took a bath. We had to go into the Cellar Bar at the Crown and the water was four feet deep."

2-11-98
C.C. Times

Church spared fire, shop not so lucky

By DOUG FRASER

STAFF WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — David McFarland, an assistant minister at the Unitarian Church, had just sat down to a meal with members of the Provincetown AIDS Support Group about 7 last night when someone ran in and yelled that there was a fire at the Crown and Anchor.

"That cut dinner short," said McFarland, who quickly sprinted across the street from the AIDS support group offices to his church, a stately white structure built in 1847.

Inside the church Sheila Ryan was participating in a therapeutic drumming session when she heard someone say there was a small fire across the street.

"We were drumming. If someone hadn't told us, we wouldn't have even known," she said.

When they opened the great double wooden church doors the fire had spread to Whaler's Wharf, an old two-story wood and tarpaper building that was once a movie theater, now divided into shops.

"Big fireballs were coming down like stars," Ryan said. "The wind was blowing them right at the church. I got down on my knees and prayed."

McFarland, Ryan and other church members started swatting at the big embers. Firefighters were already dousing the roofs of houses on either side, but their streams could not reach the high roof and steeple of the church. Church members strung garden hoses up the steps inside the steeple and started soaking the roof.

"This church is a landmark in town," said McFarland. "People were coming in who I'd never seen

before inside the church, and saying, 'Thank God it didn't get the church.'"

Some weren't as lucky.

Bob Patrick and his wife Eleanor had been through a fire before. They saw the inside of their store, Marine Specialties, gutted in 1977. Last night they were sitting in the office while the blaze was consuming Whaler's Wharf next door, separated from Marine Specialties by a scant 18 inches.

It took a call from their daughter, whose husband is on the fire department, to alert them to the fire. "We could see the flames from Whaler's Wharf just shooting up a couple of feet above our roof," said Mrs. Patrick. "Then we could feel the heat." They grabbed some garden hoses and started putting water on the roof, but the inferno next door breached the alleyway and started inside the store.

"It went up the walls, I don't know how," said Mr. Patrick. "We were able to get out the computer tapes, that's about it."

The inside was gutted again.

The store carried marine gear, Army-Navy surplus, bric-a-brac and oddities Patrick has gathered from numerous trips around the world.

Stepping over tangles of hoses, wading through ankle-deep water, Mr. Patrick was thankful to firefighters for saving the building shell, an old shed built for weir fishermen of steel beams and steel siding in the 1940s. The inside, however, he estimated as a total loss of somewhere between a quarter to a half-million dollars.

"Not a lot of things were really valuable. It's just that they were unusual and hard to replace," said Mrs. Patrick, who shivered in the cold, wrapped in a blanket.

98170ZADVA

Canteen springs into action to refresh firefighters

Passersby rush in to save gallery contents

While firemen put their lives on the line Tuesday, Ethel Roderick put on the coffee, Marilyn Downey stocked up on supplies, and the Provincetown Red Cross Canteen rolled into action, setting up tables with donuts and coffee near the fire scene.

By 7:15 p.m., Downey, Roderick, Verna Burrell and Kay Silva, all Canteen ladies, were in business at Duarte's parking lot, the staging area for firemen from 10 towns.

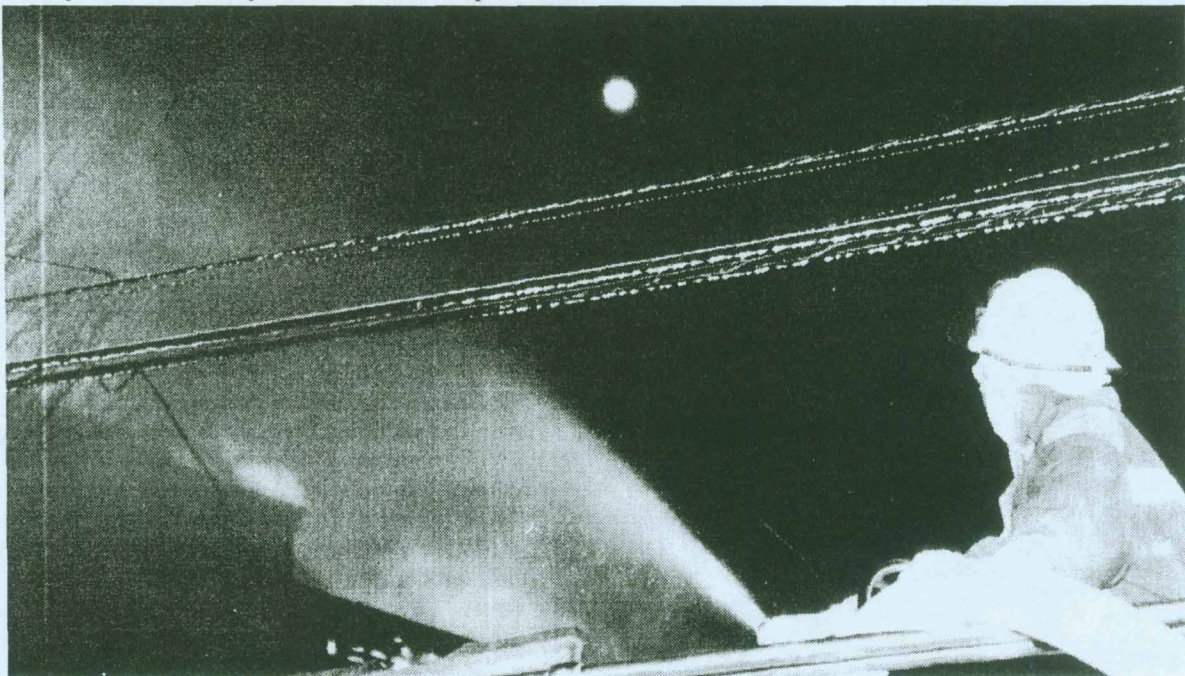
They moved to the Ryder Street lot at 10 p.m. with

fresh coffee and supplies, offering sustenance to firemen taking breaks. Ronnie White, captain of Fire House No. 1, took a cup of coffee from Downey when he returned from his home after making a quick trip to change his clothes.

"I'm getting too old for this, Marilyn," he told her. "This is the worse fire in terms of the amount of buildings involved that I've ever seen."

With dry clothes on and braced with hot coffee, he

Continued to page 30



Above: Full moon turned orange in the glow of the fire. (L.) Firemen turn attention to narrow space between Whaler's Warf and Handcrafter as flames bridge the gap

returned to the fire.

Downey said the Canteen went into action as soon as she learned of the fire. "We have a closet at the Community Center where we keep our supplies, and we went to Cumberland Farms to get doughnuts. The one on Shank Painter Road donated a dozen boxes of donuts and we bought the rest. We bought water and Gatorade at Tedeschi's because they said they wanted that."

When she heard the fire tone, "I called Ethel up. She keeps the big coffee pot at her house. I told her Ethel, there's been a bad fire, put the coffee on. She puts it on and then we're ready to roll. We have a station wagon. We improvise and we do all right."

At the Universalist-Unitarian Meeting House, Genine Principe and Jackie Sperry brewed coffee and made ham and cheese sandwiches, which they took outside to offer to the firemen when they took breaks from battling the fire.

The ham came from Deputy Fire Chief Warren Alexander's kitchen. He'd cooked it for a dinner party, but never got a chance to carve it, let alone eat

it sitting down, when the fire tone sounded.

While these women offered food and drink, other townspeople offered solace and ready hands to Julie Heller, whose collection of art was threatened when flames seemed close to overtaking her gallery on Gosnold Street. The building she uses for her gallery is a remnant of the Provincetown Playhouse, which was destroyed by fire in 1976.

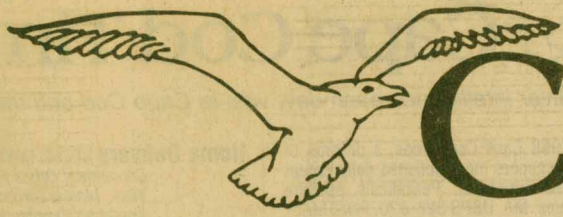
Selectman Mary-Jo Avellar was one of the first to run to Heller's to help move the paintings from the gallery to the street, but she was not alone.

Dennis Clark, Paula Sperry, Gillian Drake, Harvey Dodd and Dave Bragdon were among the others who eagerly pitched in to save the contents of the gallery.

Town Manger Keith Bergman gave the okay for Heller's paintings to be moved from the street to the Town Hall auditorium for safekeeping.

"I ran to Julie's and told her get your shit out of here in 10 minutes," Sperry said. "I went to help. Everybody went to help her."

Too many to name, said Drake. "Take a handful of Provincetown people and throw them in there, that's who was helping."



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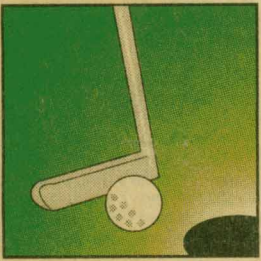
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SPORTS

Golfer Casey Martin wins right to use cart /B-1



First Kiss

Readers wax nostalgic about how it felt /C-1

View across a porch shows the fire on Whaler's Wharf during the height of the blaze Tuesday night.



Times Photo by VINCE GUADAZNO

Provincetown takes stock



Staff Photo by STEVE HEASLIP

Aerial view shows the damage to the Crown & Anchor and Whaler's Wharf buildings yesterday in Provincetown.

Mall's 1919 brick facade ruled too weak to stand

The brick facade with the arched entry faced Commercial Street through most of the 20th century, but came down under blows of a wrecking ball yesterday afternoon.

Historic preservationists had urged safety officials to save the Whaler's Wharf Mall's facade, built in 1919 when the building opened as a movie theater.

It and the attached Handcrafter and the adjacent Crown & Anchor Inn were all contributing structures to Provincetown's historic district, said Roger Keene, chairman of the town's historic commission.

"Obviously, this is a very important part of town to many people," said Keene.

Provincetown boasts the second largest historic district in the state after Nantucket, Keene said.

Despite Keene's concern, most

THE AFTERMATH

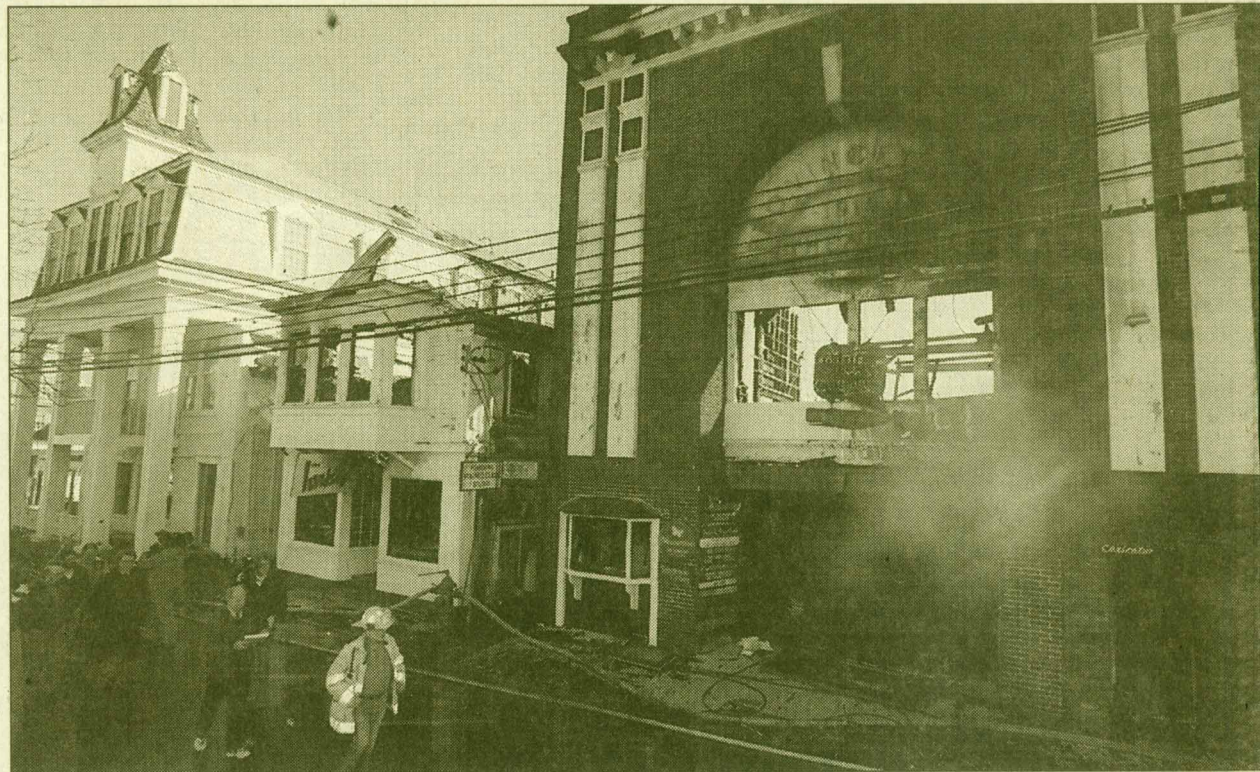
of the Cape's fire chiefs said the front wall was unstable and could fall down in a heavy wind, said Provincetown Town Manager Keith Bergman.

Bergman called in a structural engineer yesterday who also ruled the facade should come down.

"We're looking at a public safety issue," Bergman said. "If we kept it up, it would need to be secured and it would be the property owner's responsibility, not the town's."

Hundreds watched as a wrecking ball chipped from the top to the bottom of the blackened wall. The falling rubble kicked up enough soot and ash to blacken the air as far away as the police station on Shankpainter Road a mile away.

— K.C. MYERS



Cape Cod Times 2-12-1998

Staff Photo by VINCENT DeWITT

■ A firefighter passes the facades of, from left, the Crown & Anchor, Handcrafters and Whaler's Wharf yesterday.

Provincetown has history rebuilding bigger

By JACK PERRY
STAFF WRITER

Provincetown businesses have recovered from fire before and will recover again, a town selectman and businessman predicted yesterday.

"There seems to be a consistent history of building bigger and better than ever," said Henry Evans, a selectman and owner of the Provincetown Inn.

The fire struck the heart of Provincetown's commercial district, destroying the Crown & Anchor Motor Inn and the Whaler's Wharf Mall, displacing dozens of artisans and workers.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

But members of the business community were thankful yesterday that the fire hadn't spread further through the crowded commercial district of mostly wooden structures.

They praised the fire department and were grateful that the fire wasn't fueled by strong winds and that it didn't strike during the summer season.

The damaged businesses will recover through their own resilience and with the community's help, members of the business community predicted.

"It is going to hurt a lot of businesspeople in town, but it could be a lot worse," said Candace Collins-Boden, director of the Provincetown Chamber of Commerce. "We're grateful the wind wasn't blowing.

"The business community here is pretty supportive of our own, and we're all thinking of what we can do to help each other," she said.

Every business owner on Commercial Street was affected by the fire, at least psychologically, said Bob Harrison, president of the chamber. "I'm sure anyone who owns property said, 'That could have been me.'"

Napi VanDereck, a lifelong resi-

dent and owner of Napi's Restaurant since 1975, said, "I'm optimistic. I think people are pretty resilient."

He noted that the owners of Marine Specialties, which was damaged, recovered from a fire in 1977. Dale Elmer, owner of the Whaler's Wharf Mall, is inventive and could have the mall operating under tents as an outdoor flea market by summer, VanDereck predicted.

The Crown & Anchor employed an estimated 50 people in the summer, while the mall was home to between 15 and 20 artisans.

Evans said popular businesses such as the Red Lion and Pilgrim

House recovered from fires a decade ago. The Pilgrim House, a motel and dance club on Commercial Street, was rebuilt and is now "stronger than ever."

Although devastating to the businesses and workers involved, the fire won't have a long-term adverse affect on Provincetown's economy, Evans said. The Crown & Anchor was a popular entertainment spot, but the town has plenty of other restaurants, clubs and inns to attract and entertain people.

"I don't see a tremendous adverse affect," he said. "I do see a tremendous incentive to rebuild as quickly as possible. It can rise from the ashes and become at least as

2-12-1998 Cape Cod Times

er, better

good if not better than before."

Bernie Tolassi, economic development director for the Lower Cape Cod Community Development Corporation, said his organization is ready to help with business advice and low-interest loans.

For example, the organization has short-term loans that can help businesses restock before summer. The agency can be reached at 240-7873.

The offices of state Sen. Henri Rauschenbach, R-Brewster, and U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, D-Quincy, were in touch with town officials yesterday. They have offered to help the businesses recover.

Subject: Tremendous Effort!!!

Date: Wed, 11 Feb 1998 11:39:19 -0500

From: Provincetown Public Library Patron <ptown@ptownlib.com>

Reply-To: ptown@ptownlib.net

To: nofield@tiac.net

Mr. Nofeild,

I hope you don't mind that I send a congratulation, and pray many blessing for the rescue team of Provincetown, and the whole of the Cape. I felt, as many others did, that the situation with the fire was far out of control. Thank God I was wrong!! The local population should be very pleased with last nights success. Of course there are some who will have blame placed upon them for coming short in some way. It is natural. It is the only way that they can stay on top of things. The training is well worth it. The town should spare no cost in heightening the awareness of the general population about the dangers, and ways of being active, rather than being a helpless spectator in the event that a simular situation should arise.

Praise, Praise, Praise

Thank You Rescue Workers of Cape Cod!!!

Michael Monteiro

386 Commercial St.

Provincetown, Ma 02657

Michaeljm58@hotmail.com



Cape Cod Times

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New England News Association's Sunday Newspaper of the Year

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IN OUR VIEW

From the ashes

■ Fire devastated part of Provincetown's heart Tuesday night. Let's join hands and begin the rebirth.

WHAT next, Provincetown? What to do, now that several historic downtown landmarks are incinerated, and dozens of people out of business? Christie Murphy of Provincetown faxed a letter to the editor Wednesday morning that answers those questions:

The fire is out, the rubble will be cleared, we will have been a sound byte in the evening news, a headline in the paper. We wholeheartedly thank our lucky stars that no one was seriously hurt (bless all those fire workers who risked their lives and worked tirelessly for hours and hours). We will all move on. Summer is, after all, around the corner. However, there are some people who will not be able to recuperate quite as quickly. They are the handcrafters from the Handcrafter/Whalers Wharf mall. These people were devastated by this all-consuming fire. A handcrafter's livelihood is solely based upon what they can produce with their hands. Their tools are their investment in their future. Their materials their potential. Their finished product their income.

All these things were lost. Years of building up stock, piece by piece, gone in an instant.

The handcrafters in this town are a dying breed. Dale Elmer, owner of Whalers Wharf and an artist and sculptor in his own right, nurtured these people. He encouraged them to create, and offered them low rents on shops to give them a chance to offer the world their designs and vision. When a handcrafter is out of stock

in a particular design, there is not the luxury of making a phone call to reorder. They rely on their perseverance and talent to fill their shelves and walls.

Irreplaceable are the losses of this fire — the Crown and Anchor, the Rooster and the Back Room, Lorraine's, Marine Specialties, and the unique community and environment of the Whaler's Wharf.

We have always been a community that has pulled together in times of need. We all know of someone at some time (usually a friend or casual acquaintance) who has needed the community to reach out to them, to help support them, or help them solve a problem. Let's put that community spirit into action.

Will the community support these people in getting their livelihoods back on track? Will the Realtors and landlords in town offer a break in rental prices to help these people back on their feet? (Can you imagine having to make everything you sell and pay \$25,000 to \$40,000 rent?) Will the shops in town offer space on their shelves for people to sell their work? How can we work together to get these people back to work? All of these questions may seem premature, but we all know that it will be September before we know it, and at that date it will be too late for us to put a helping-hand plan into action.

We can do this. This is our chance to save a portion of the real heart of Provincetown. People of creative and independent spirit — they almost disappeared once. Let's not let it happen again. We can do this. Together.

The Handcrafters Relief Fund has been established at Seamen's Bank. Donations can be sent to, Handcrafters Relief Fund, Seamen's Bank, P.O. Box 659, Commercial Street, Provincetown, MA 02657, Att: Laurie Watts-Bumpus, Customer Service.

Two lives seared in blaze's aftermath

By K.C. MYERS
STAFF WRITER

2-13-98
C.C. Times

PROVINCETOWN — Two days after fire destroyed historic landmarks in Provincetown's downtown, many residents are concerned for two men at the center of the tragedy: Dale Elmer, owner of the Whaler's Wharf Mall, and David Bragdon, the mall's night watchman, who tried to kill himself the day after the blaze.

The two men lead different lives but are close friends. Elmer, 68, owned a jewelry business in New York City in the 1950s and has owned the shopping arcade in Provincetown since 1973.

Bragdon, 65, is a quiet man who may not own any property at all and never talked about any relatives. He works out religiously in the weight room at the Province-

FIRE *2-13-1998* *C.C. TIMES*

town Gym and has a physique that belies his age.

Bragdon had spent many winters by himself in the Everglades or Key West, Fla., and for the past decade has spent his nights at the Whaler's Wharf Mall, guarding stacks of jewelry and quietly writing or sketching.

Craftspeople say Elmer feels responsible for the artists' community he sheltered. Ever since he purchased the Handcrafter in 1963, and then the entire Whaler's Wharf Mall 10 years later, he has kept rents low so individual crafters could afford it. He hired Bragdon about 10 years ago.

Bragdon apparently felt so guilty that the fire started on his watch that he tried to kill himself.

Bragdon was first to spot the flames and dial 911. Then he sat in Adams Pharmacy with his face in his hands. During an interview with the Cape Cod Times that evening he said he was to blame for the fire.

The police ruled the cause of the \$6 million fire accidental, possibly touched off by an electric heater in the building. Police said Bragdon cooperated fully with investigators.

The next day Bragdon fired a flare gun into his mouth while parked in his car along Route 6 in Truro in an apparent suicide attempt. He set his car on fire in the process, but his injuries are apparently not life-threatening.

Cape Cod Hospital would not disclose his condition. Elmer said a hospital spokesman told him only that Bragdon had been released yesterday and taken to another hospital.

Elmer's companion, Wendy Christern, had talked to Bragdon after the fire.

"We tried to calm him, but he said, 'No, no I can't face Dale,'" she said.

"I can see where if David felt responsible for the fire, he would feel so bad he would be so devastated," said Wendy Borgstrom, a personal trainer who works out with Bragdon at the Provincetown Gym.

"He has an overwrought sense of responsibility," Borgstrom said. "He is a real sweetheart. I just want him to know we care about him and nobody blames him."

Elmer arrived in town at about 3:30 a.m. yesterday, after a rock-collecting trip in Arizona, to survey the damages to his building. He woke up to a radio news report that Bragdon was in intensive care.

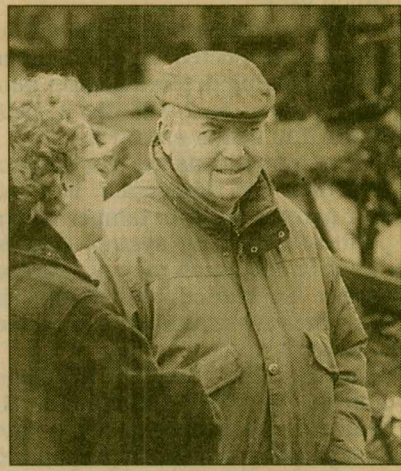
Before seeing the remains of Whaler's Wharf, Elmer called the hospital.

"Dale said, 'I've got to go down to see David, so he can stop all this nonsense,'" said Christern.

But Elmer said the hospital would tell him little about Bragdon.

"At this point, I still can't get in touch with him to say, 'You know, don't sweat it,'" Elmer said yesterday afternoon.

Elmer toured the charred wreckage that once held much of what he



■ David Bragdon, left, night watchman at Whaler's Wharf, reported the fire and later attempted suicide. Dale Elmer, right, expressed concern for Bragdon and has tried to contact him.

2-13-1998
L.A. TIMES

Benefit rescheduled at Surf Club

The destruction of the Crown & Anchor, the heart of Provincetown's entertainment community, could not stop a benefit planned for a well-known actress and cabaret performer.

The benefit, to help Val Santuccio recover from a series of strokes and two heart attacks suffered in December, was originally scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Saturday at the Crown & Anchor.

It has been rescheduled for the Surf Club. The ashes were still hot at the Crown when the Surf Club generously offered its space for the benefit, said Chris Murphy.

She, Clem Silva, Paul Schuppert, and Sarah Bailey have or-

ganized the event, which includes an art auction, donated food, and door prizes. The suggested donation is \$10.

"Val's been a very active person in the community and the community is really paying her back," Murphy said. "They are coming out of the woodwork to help."

Santuccio, 51, has appeared in numerous plays with the Provincetown Theatre Company and performed cabaret shows at the Crown & Anchor since arrival in Provincetown in the late 1960s. Most recently, she worked as a real estate broker.

"She's a wonderful person and she'd do the same thing for anybody," Murphy said.

MEMA offers loans for rebuilding

2-13-98 C.C. TIMES

PROVINCETOWN - Low-interest loans and rebuilding loans are available for small businesses displaced by Tuesday's fire through the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

MEMA representatives will be in Provincetown Town Hall today from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and tomorrow from 9 a.m. to noon. to meet with anyone who may have suffered a loss from the fire.

"It's very important that anyone affected by the fire come to the town hall to speak with us and fill out a damage survey," said Peter LaPorte, director of MEMA.

The more information the agency is able to obtain, the more loans and other services it will be able to muster, MEMA spokesman Doug Cope said.

MEMA is a state agency that coordinates federal, state and local resources during disasters and emergencies.

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CAPE CODDER

Vol. LIII No. 13



COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER COMPANY

Friday, February 13, 1998

2 Sections

75¢

5 ALARMS



The skyline of Provincetown as seen from the Holiday Inn breakwater is ablaze Tuesday night as flames from the Crown and Anchor Motel and Whaler's Wharf, at left, spread in the wind toward the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum, at far right.
Staff Photo by Robert Barboza

Raging Inferno Destroys Landmarks

By Joyce Johnson

PROVINCETOWN—If hell is a raging inferno, then hell descended briefly on this historic fishing village Tuesday night.

And if divine intervention is possible, then perhaps the abatement of a brisk wind as the fire reached full force — a wind that was driving embers horizontally across Commercial Street to other properties — could be laid at the feet of such a phenomenon.

The reduced wind allowed more than 100 trained firefighters from the canal to the Cape tip to control the raging fire that broke out at about 6:30 p.m., destroying two landmark buildings and threatening the entire center of town had firefighters not responded promptly and skillfully.

"It's what they have been trained for," said Police Chief Robert Anthony, watching the blazing fire from the lawn of the historic Unitarian-Universalist Meeting House which was threatened by flying embers during the initial moments of the fire.


Not so lucky were the famous Crown and Anchor motel and the Whaler's Wharf, gutted by the fire except for their facades. Marine Specialties Inc. received heavy smoke and water damage, as well as some fire damage.

Firefighting teams from Bourne to

(Continued on Page 3)

Staff Photo by Joyce Johnson

THE CAPE CODDER 2-13-1998



Early Wednesday morning the devastation of the multimillion dollar Tuesday night fire in Provincetown is evident in this view of the remains of the famous Crown and Anchor Motel. The Pilgrim Monument, threatened by brush fires from flying embers, stands serene following quick efforts by firefighters to douse the wildfires.

Raging Inferno

(Continued From Page 1)

Provincetown answered the five-alarm alert, somehow maneuvering successfully in the narrow streets and byways of the fishing village. That the fire occurred in deep winter, when most businesses are closed, traffic is light and parking lots available, certainly assisted in enabling firefighters to finally pour tons of water on the inferno. Those factors are believed to have contributed greatly to confining the fire to the two wooden structures, with the metal and cement block walls of the Marine Specialties store saving that famous landmark from more structural damage.

The state fire marshal's office said late Wednesday that the estimated dollar loss "will be measured in the millions of dollars." The cause of the fire has focused on a space heater used by the night caretaker of the Whaler's Wharf, David Bragdon, who lived in the back of the huge, open structure, filled with art and crafts booths. The caretaker was examined in the emergency room of Cape Cod Hospital in Hyannis on Wednesday, but not admitted as a patient, after allegedly attempting to take his own life.

Several of the 16 business owners within the Whaler's Wharf complex said Mr. Bragdon told them that he discovered the fire around 6:30 Tuesday night and attempted to smother it with blankets but was unsuccessful and then ran for help.

The fire in Whaler's Wharf was officially reported to the fire department at 6:49 p.m. Minutes later several emergency vehicles were on the scene and heavy hose lines were being dragged along Commercial Street as Engine 5 hooked up to a hydrant near Seamen's Bank and No. 3 hooked up on the main waterline on Bradford Street to supply the hoses. Firefighter Roger Martin who was in charge of Engine 5 said "millions" of gallons of water were poured on the fire at a rate of 1,000 gallons a minute.

Shock, disbelief and fear were on the faces of shop owners on Commercial Street as they watched the flames come closer to their properties. Although firefighters were on the scene minutes after the alarm was sounded, the most disturbing moments of the long night may have been the 10 to 20 minutes before the heavy



A firefighter sits on a hose and holds onto the shoulders of another firefighter to prevent him from being lifted into the air by the pressure as he directs the nozzle of a hose pouring 1,000 gallons of water per minute on the Crown and Anchor Motel, which was a total loss. Staff Photo by Joyce Johnson

red flames bursting into the sky. She called to her husband and they ran to the shop and began removing items. Their building, mostly cement block construction, was not damaged, although some of the clothing sustained smoke damage.

Mr. Hamnquist said his three children were terrified by the rapid rate in which the fire spread.

Judy Heller, who owns a gallery in all that remains of the historic Provincetown Playhouse-on-the-Wharf which burned in 1977, was alerted to the fire and immediately, with the help of citizens in the area, removed her collection of art by Provincetown painters and sculptors to the sidewalk across from Adams Pharmacy. Friends and others who saw her plight assisted her in removing the artwork to safety at town hall.

Selectman Jane Antolini, who was at town hall, said everyone pitched in with a wonderful spirit.

"I was touched," she said, especially by the action of Leif Hamnquist who was terrified his parents would lose their shop and ran back and forth with items from the shop to the hall.

A number of firefighters remarked that if the wind had not abated and temperatures, in the 40s, had been instead in the 20s, the fire could have been much more of a disaster. As it was, only one firefighter received an injury — a dislocated

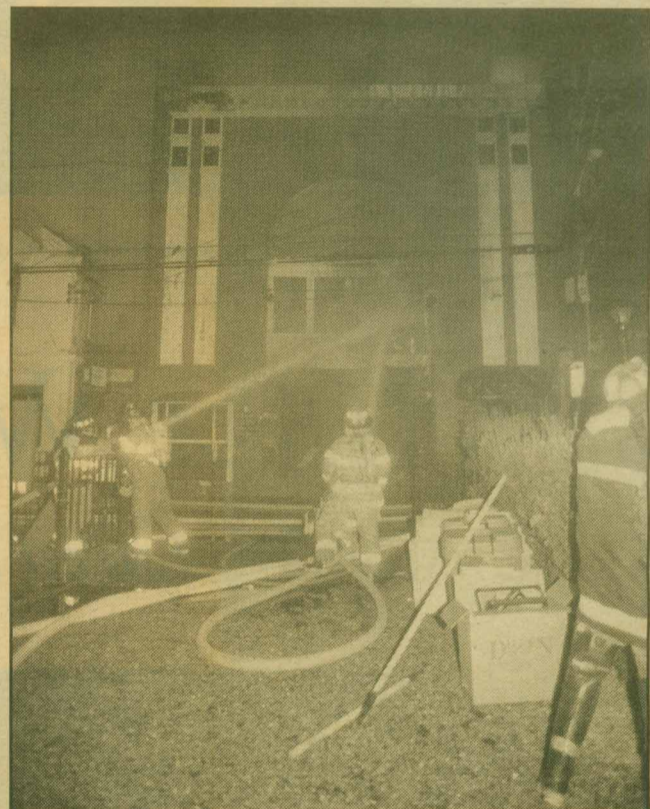
shoulder — and several suffered minor smoke inhalation.

Ken Oxtoby of Truro, an emergency medical technician, said there were 10 ambulances on hand in case they were needed and a MedFlight helicopter was on standby at Provincetown Airport. Local and down-Cape chapters of the Red Cross were on hand to serve coffee and refreshments.

Police Chief Anthony, watching the heavy hoses playing tons of water on what remained of Whaler's Wharf at around 10 p.m., remarked at the skill of the firefighters, both at coordinating the firefighting and taking down the fire, whose flames could be seen for miles.

The potential destructiveness of the blaze was evidenced when wildfires broke out on the banks of the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum on the hill behind town hall. The museum's administrative director, Chuck Turley, told The Cape Codder that he was headed from his home in Wellfleet to have dinner in Provincetown and gasped when he came to High Head in North Truro and saw the flaming horizon.

"It was one of the most frightening things I



The historic brick facade of Whaler's Wharf was all that remained standing Wednesday morning following a five-alarm fire that destroyed the building and the neighboring Crown and Anchor Motel Tuesday night. Staff Photo by Robert Barboza



A single firefighter, at right, works alone on a deck at the rear of two structures destroyed by fire Tuesday night on the Provincetown waterfront. This photograph, taken from the Seamen's Bank parking lot, shows the fire at the height of its fury at about 7:30 p.m. The deck faces Provincetown Harbor. Staff Photo by Joyce Johnson

hoses were rolled in place and water began flowing through the nozzles onto the buildings, relieving the trucks that were using their limited tanker capacity to fight the fire.

Deputy Fire Chief Warren Alexander, in charge due to the absence of Fire Chief Michael Trovato who was on vacation, watched from beside his vehicle parked at the entrance of the Crown and Anchor parking lot, calling in orders with his portable radio.

All eyes were on the flames sprouting from the rear roof of the Crown and Anchor, lighting the sky. Brisk winds from off the harbor carried them toward the street and quickly — too quickly — they intensified and spread along the entire rim, red sparks descending in a cascade as thick as snowflakes. Cloth jackets smoldered and the odor of singed hair overcame that of the thick smoke spreading along the street.

The scene was brightly lit by the streetlights until someone yelled, "Call ComElectric!" and within minutes the lights went out and a curtain of black descended over the scene. Firefighters became slow-moving shadows silhouetted in the flames that had now burst through ground floor windows and doorways. Large clumps of glowing sparks fell on the hood of a yellow Mercedes parked in front of the Provincetown Bookstore but no one moved to brush them off. At that moment it was not a vehicle that could go up in flames, but a town.

David and Lidia Hamnquist, who own Global Gifts, a shop fronting on Commercial Street and the Crown and Anchor Motel parking lot, hastened to remove much of their merchandise as they watched the rear portion of the motel burst into flames and finally collapse. Ms. Hamnquist said she had been taking pictures from her home, a quarter of a mile from the shop, of the nearly full moon rising over the skyline when she noticed heavy black smoke obliterate the moon, then brilliant

have ever seen," he said.

Within minutes he was at the museum directing firefighters who moved fire apparatus to the base of the monument to put out the brush fires.

Hattie and William Fitts, who live on Nelson Avenue three to four miles from the site, noted their vehicles were covered with a film of soot the next morning.

Jan McPherson, who had a shop in the Whaler's Wharf complex, said she believed the building was

insured but not the shops because of the high cost of insurance. She said she hopes the town will allow the shopkeepers to put up temporary booths next summer or until it is decided what will happen to the property.

The building's owner, Dale Elmer, who lives on the site, was out of town, as were many other of the shopkeepers, whom she and others were attempting to notify.

Ms. Antolini said there are no town funds that she knows of for assisting in a disaster of this kind.

She said it would be wonderful for the town to buy the property and make a real park out of it, one that could not be turned into a parking lot at some later date.



Firefighters in Provincetown take a break in fighting the five-alarm fire that destroyed two historic structures and threatened others Tuesday night on Commercial Street. Staff Photo by Robert Barboza

Fire in Provincetown

By Noel Beyle

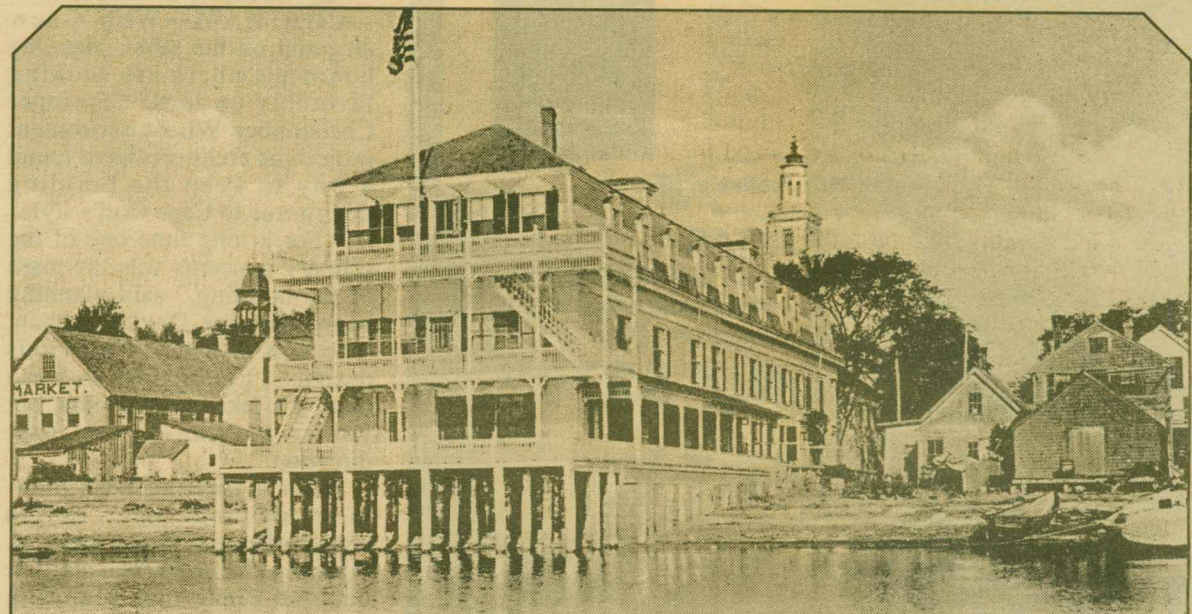
The massive fire this week that consumed several historic old buildings and damaged others spelled the end of an era in Provincetown. The legendary nightspot Crown and Anchor Motor Inn, at 247 Commercial St., was extinguished in the flames, as was the Cape tip's old movie house (the Provincetown Theatre, built in 1919 and currently recycled into a retail mall-like shopping complex known as Whaler's Wharf). Marine Specialties, the Patricks' magnet military surplus and you-name-it bargain store, sustained heavy damage but stood its ground against the fire.

But, it was the Crown and Anchor's loss that touched the most pages of history. Originally called Ocean Hall in the 1800s when it was used for shows and entertainment, it was turned into Provincetown's largest hotel and dubbed The Central House. It subsequently underwent several name changes to the New Central House, the Town House, the Sea Horse Inn, and eventually the Crown and Anchor Motor Inn. In short, the place had some history to it. And, early artists and postcard makers were well aware of the building's appeal.

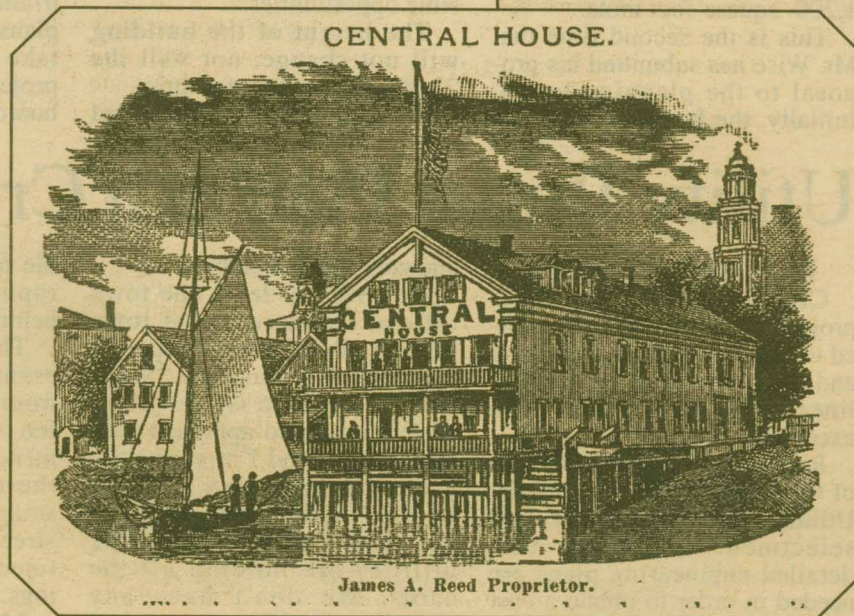
Here's what Herman A. Jennings had to say about the Central House in his 1890 classic guidebook to the town, "Provincetown, or Odds and Ends from the Tip End," that accompanied an artist's engraving of the historic inn:

"This hotel is the only one in the place that is situated on the Main Street and also the shore beach. It was built by Timothy P. Johnson, but nothing definite can be found as to the date of building. It was first used as a public hall where shows and entertainments were given. At one time a bowling alley and saloon was kept in it, under the management of William Crowell. In 1868 it was purchased from the heirs of Timothy P. Johnson by Allen Reed, and the whole building underwent an alteration; it was enlarged, a billiard hall attached to it and more sleeping rooms added, making it at that time the largest hotel in the place.

"Mr. Reed managed the business until his death, which took



New Central House, Provincetown, Mass.



place in 1881, when he was succeeded by his son, Mr. James A. Reed, the present proprietor and manager, who also has held the position of Customs Officer and conducted his business from a room fitted in the building for

that purpose.

"This house has accommodations for about seventy-five guests, has a fine billiard and pool-room attached, ladies' parlor and sitting-room, gents' reading and smoking-room,

fronts the principal street of the town, while from the veranda at the rear a fine view of the harbor and its shipping can be

obtained; the facilities for bathing are also good."

Noel Beyle writes from North Eastham.

According to Irma Ruckstuhl's 1987 Dover book, "Old Provincetown in Early Photographs," The Central House billed itself as the "Only Hotel in Provincetown situated on the beach." Continued Ms. Ruckstuhl: "Originally known as Ocean Hall and used as a public hall for shows and entertainment, the building was purchased in 1868 by Allen Reed, who enlarged it and converted it into a hotel.

Following his death in 1881, Mr. Reed's son James, who also served as deputy inspector and collector of customs, took over as manager. Prior to buying The Central House, the elder Mr. Reed ran the Pilgrim House from 1863 to 1868." At the time this black and white postcard was popular (just after the turn of the century), it had been rechristened The New Central House with a covered porch girdling the ground floor overlooking the shoreline to the east and the harbor to the south. Today, a much larger beach created by dredged sand from the harbor bottom sits out in front of the historic structure, now a victim of fire. In 1998, vintage postcard views like this gem are all that is left to remind folks of the heyday of the Crown and Anchor Motor Inn — when it was known as the New Central House.

Whaler's Wharf fire tops them all for men, equipment

The Whaler's Wharf fire was the biggest fire in terms of men and equipment in the 18-year history of the Barnstable County Mutual Aid System, said Brewster Fire Chief Roy Jones III, system coordinator.

It was Provincetown's first five-alarm fire. It was almost a six-alarm fire, the first ever on the Cape, he said. The first five-alarm fire on the Cape was in Brewster in 1993 when the Crosby mansion and beach house burned.

But a five-alarm fire in Brewster does not translate into the same deployment of men and machines that a five-alarm fire in Provincetown does. "When you have a five-alarm fire in Provincetown, that moves substantially more equipment than a five-alarm fire on the mid-Cape because we realize there's a much greater potential for a conflagration there than anywhere else," he said.

When the fire tone sounded at 6:49 p.m. on February 10, Warren Alexander, deputy fire chief, was at Whaler's Wharf by 6:51 p.m.

"I looked up, saw sparks and embers and a small amount of fire coming through the roof. Within one minute, I called in a second alarm for Provincetown. That alerts firemen who were in the shower that we have a serious incident," he said.

Truro Fire Chief Tom "Punchy" Prada was on his first sip of beer at the VFW Hall when he heard the tone. He and his wife Donna had just bought filet mignons at the A & P, were going to have a beer and then go home to cook dinner.

When the tone sounded, "I got in my pickup to check it out. By the time I got to the Donut Shop, I could already see smoke and flames. I said to myself, this is going to be trouble."

He parked his truck, then suited up with the gear he always travels with and joined in the firefighting.

"I had the steaks in my truck and they stayed there for 24 hours," he said.

At 6:55 p.m., Alexander called in a first alarm with the county, which started bringing men and equipment from Truro. Prada was the first on the scene, but he was quickly joined by 17 Truro firemen with three engines and one rescue truck.

"I knew that was the minimum I would need, but only two minutes later, at 6:57 p.m., after seeing more of what we had, I went to a second alarm, which brought in four engines and a ladder truck from Truro and Wellfleet, two rescue trucks and Truro's supply truck with lights and air," Alexander said.

"I went to third alarm at 6:59 p.m., which got us another Truro vehicle, another Wellfleet vehicle,

that came from Plymouth, Kingston, Duxbury, Carver, Wareham and Onset.

"When Plymouth moved vehicles onto the Cape, I understand that vehicles moved all the way from Brockton into Plymouth," Alexander said.

By 8:30 p.m., "things started to turn around. We had the fire surrounded and it was under control by 10 p.m. Three attempts were made to enter the Crown, but the firemen were driven back, turning it into what firefighters call a "surround-and-drown fire," he said.

Four ladder trucks fought the blaze, including Provincetown's own 75-footer, Orleans' s 85-footer, and two 110-footers from Harwich and Barnstable.

"We had some difficulty getting the ladders in place," Alexander said. "We had to move parked vehicles by hand. Several firemen picked them up and put them on the sidewalk or pushed them into yards. By that time, we had an awful lot of manpower and we could have moved the Monument."

Eight ladder trucks were in Provincetown in case they were needed, although only four of them fought the blaze, Jones said. "This was the most equipment ever moved on the Cape, a movement of 69 pieces of major fire apparatus, not counting ambulances, plus a total of 32 pieces of apparatus from Plymouth County," Jones said. Ten fire chiefs were on hand to help Alexander.

Jones stayed in the staging area coordinating the men and equipment until about 1 a.m., when Alexander and Prada took breaks and he and the Chatham fire chief took over their command positions on Commercial Street.

Alexander returned to his post at 4:30 a.m., after a three-hour break and Jones returned to the staging area. "This was definitely a major fire, one of the high spots in my career," he said.

Much like a general moving an army into place, the county communications center, which coordinates the mutual aid system, "works like a clock," Jones said. "As soon as you go to the third-alarm, a fire chief goes to the communications building to supervise what is going on to keep all the stuff moving to Provincetown. West Barnstable Chief John Jenkins took charge of coordinating the movement of men and machines from the communications center, Jones said.

"This way you've got a fire chief who is making the decisions on how to deal with the movement of all this stuff, both to the fire and to cover in the background. You've got to have somebody there who can keep track of what is going on. It's a fantastic thing."

Handcrafters hit hard by fire losses

981902ADV3

By Marilyn Miller

When fire wipes you out, destroys your home and business and leaves you with just the clothes on your back, little things can mean a lot.

So it was with Dale Elmer, 68, who returned on February 11 from a rock-collecting trip in Arizona after his apartment and his two businesses, the Handcrafter and Whaler's Wharf, had been destroyed by fire.

"Dale took the news calmly when I called," said Jan McPherson, Elmer's former wife and an artist who lost much of her artwork in the fire.

"Dale's whole life was in these buildings," she said.

"He's never been interested in money. Whatever money he makes, he puts right back into the business."

Two days after the fire, as he surveyed the rubble-strewn lots that once held his buildings, he uncovered a box containing photos and some personal items he thought he would never see again.

He was able to laugh through his tears when he related how he had been busy buying rocks in Arizona with Ricardo Cuencas, a jeweler who rented shop space from him in the wharf, when he learned of the fire.

"Ricardo and I got some good buys in Arizona and we were headed to New Mexico, but we had to cut the trip short. Otherwise, I'd have spent even more

money. I flew home with the clothes on my back, leaving a laundry bag of clothes with Ricardo, who's now on his way back with all the clothes I own and the rocks I purchased for my next flea market," he said with a laugh.

McPherson was "delighted" Tuesday morning when she learned that Tucker, her young male cat, survived the fire. "I'd love it if Tucker could be found," she said the day after the fire. "He's the cutest little guy. But I'm afraid he and his mother are both gone."

She put food outside on the beach just in case. Tuesday, Tucker showed up.

"She couldn't believe it," Elmer said. "She was delighted."

Carolyn Miller, Advocate astrologer, lost two com-

Continued to page 26

Handcrafters hit hard by fire losses

Continued from page 3

puters and her mailing list of 10,000 names, acquired during her 18 years of operating The Third Eye at Whaler's Wharf.

Monday after five days of shoveling through the rubble, she found her laptop computer. "It was buried under Dale's washing machine," she said. "I had made backup disks of my mailing list, but I lost them in the fire."

Her computer is a mass of melted plastic, but the hard drive seems to be intact. "I'm going to try to have the data on it recovered, if that's possible. If not, then I'm going to have to start from scratch building up a new mailing list of customers."

Tuesday, Miller found a strong box containing her safety deposit box key, her bank book, licenses and other important documents.

"I was going to have to pay \$90 to get another key to my safety deposit box, so it was great to find that," she said.

Myra Gold, who operated MG Leather at Whaler's Wharf, lost \$150,000 of leather, tools, buckles and rivets in the fire. She and her friends turned up buckles and tools after five days of sifting rubble and dirt through mesh screens.

The buckles cannot be salvaged, but some of her leather stamping tools that she found can, she said.

"I stayed up until midnight scraping them, then soaking and cleaning them off. I think I'll be able to use them again. I've been doing leather work since I was a kid and I've collected hundreds of stamping tools, many of them stamps that you can never get again. I've lost at least \$150,000 in inventory, hardware and tools. I've put every penny back into my business all my life, and now I'm out of business. I've lost everything."

She said she signed up for assistance, but instead of a low-interest loan to get back on her feet, she needs financial help with no strings attached. It's almost impossible to get started again when you have no inventory, no shop and no money to start with.

"What we really need is funding given to us that we don't have to pay back," she said. "My only possibility of getting back into business again is if Dale is able to put up some sort of temporary structure and if I don't have to pay any rent. Then, maybe I can get it together."

Gold purchased a condo last year. Now she's wor-

ried about how she'll pay the mortgage. She and the other 14 people who rented shop space from Elmer at reasonable rates are now in a bind.

"We're at the mercy of the town," she said. "I worked my whole life to own my own house and my own business, but now I'm stuck with a condo and no business. We don't need loans. We need donations and immediate cash to start back up in business."

Cindy Gast, owner of the Shell Shop, was in Thailand, unaware of the fire, said Michelle Cannava, manager of her shop. Gast easily lost \$150,000 of inventory, Cannava said. She had one shell alone that cost \$1,500.

"I'm just crossing my fingers that she took it home with her before she left for Thailand. I haven't slept for three nights. I'm trying to salvage anything I can for her, and I'm going to stick with her through all of this," she said.

Steven Drysdale was on vacation in the Caribbean with his wife Randi Lyn when he learned of the fire. He cut his one-month vacation short after five days to fly back and try to salvage his jewelry tools in the fire debris.

Monday he was exultant when he found a metal draw plate valued at \$160 that he uses to make wires of 32 different widths.

"I found it in the rubble," he said, holding it aloft. "I'm one of the schmucks who lost everything. I had \$30,000 worth of tools in there."

He found his safe, containing some gems, and Tuesday, he found his gold tray with two ounces of gold in it. "I just got back from taking it over to the bank," he said. "I've found a lot of my tools."

Drysdale said he's perhaps the most fortunate of Elmer's tenants. "I'm the only one who has a place to go to," he said. He had rented a shop in Orleans before he left for vacation. His space at Whaler's Wharf was not large enough for all his tools. He said he'll provide room in his new shop for some of the other displaced jewelers until Elmer is able to rebuild.

"I don't need for people to give me money," he said. "I need my tools so I can make a living. If I can get my tools back, then I can start making a living. If Dale gets the money to rebuild, we'll come back here," he said.

"You can't ask for a better landlord than Dale. Everything that I do is because of the encouragement he gave me the last 10 years."

Emergency services readied for fire victims

Bergman promises coordinated help to rebuild

The Whaler's Wharf fire, believed to have been caused by an faulty electric space heater, cost more than \$6 million in property damage alone, and has left 37 persons seeking assistance from the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency to rebuild their lives.

David Struhs, commissioner of the state Department of Environmental Protection, will be in town today to meet with members of regulatory boards to go over the Title V and Chapter 91 license issues that will have to be addressed before Whaler's Wharf, the Handcrafter, and the Crown & Anchor may be rebuilt.

U.S. Rep. William Delahunt and his aide Mark Forest, toured the fire scene Saturday, assuring fire victims that they will do everything possible to assist them. Friday, state Sen. Henri Rauschenbach toured the site with John O'Brien, director of the Cape Cod Economic Development Council.

They met with Dale Elmer, owner of Whaler's Wharf and the Handcrafter, which were destroyed, and Milton Isserlis and Jaime Veara, lawyers for the Crown, which was destroyed except for the shell of the front of the building on Commercial Street.

Delahunt encouraged them to apply for whatever federal and state assistance is available. Twenty-five persons had to sign up for MEMA assistance in order for the governor to be able to declare a state of emergency in Provincetown.

Such a declaration would leave the fire victims eligible to apply for federal Small Business Administration low-interest loans administered by the state, Town Manager Keith Bergman said Tuesday.

"We got enough properties to qualify for the emergency declaration, and Delahunt told us once the state submits those figures, he'll work to get the decla-

Emergency services readied for fire victims

MEMA taking applications

Continued from page 1

ration of emergency processed as soon as he can. I'm hoping we'll hear from him within the next day or so."

MEMA officials were in Town Hall Friday and Saturday accepting applications for assistance. Judith Witcher, who helped people fill out applications for assistance, said Saturday that well over 30 had applied by then. She said she would leave applications for people still out of town to fill out when they return.

E. Winn Davis, assistant town manager, said, "If we can get at least 25 businesses or property owners to sign up, saying that they have uninsured losses, we might be able to get the state to provide funding at rates as low as four percent interest."

If the governor declares a state of emergency in Provincetown, then financial assistance will also be available to people who will lose incomes as a result of the fire, he said.

Bob Clark, accountant for the Crown, said Kenneth Lemon, owner, will rebuild the historic structure, one of Provincetown's early hotels. The Crown, assessed by the town for \$2.13 million, was insured.

"We're going to rebuild," Clark said. "We'll shoot for a July 4th opening. The contractors don't know if that's possible yet, but they'll try."

Elmer's Handcrafter, which he purchased in 1963 for \$24,000, is assessed by the town for \$973,200. Whaler's Wharf, which he bought in 1977 for \$100,000, is assessed at \$1.94 million.

Although he had almost \$3 million worth of property, Elmer said he was only insured for \$225,000. He said he didn't know how far that would go in clearing the rubble and rebuilding.

"I carried very little insurance," he said. "I don't know exactly what I can do now. I've had some very generous offers of loans from individuals whom I won't name, but I know you can't borrow money without paying it back."

Marine Specialties, owned by the Patrick family, was assessed for \$954,000. This was their second fire since 1977, said Elizabeth Patrick. They have insurance, she said. "We were certainly luckier than Whaler's Wharf."

Pat Patrick, who spent all winter getting the company computers working properly, rushed to the office in time to grab the computer files and the file server. He then donned an air pack provided by firemen to lead them through the smoke to the east wall of Marine Specialties, so that they could run their hoses through the windows. to fight the fire within Whaler's Wharf.

"You could feel the heat," he said. "I got a tan. All of the inventory is wet and smoke damaged, and some of it is burned. "

Warren Alexander, building commissioner, said Elmer's two properties, as pre-existing non-conforming structures, can be rebuilt on the same footprint. But he will have to rebuild to modern code, which will require a sprinkler system. He will also have to pay to have the rubble from his two shops removed, an expense that could be considerable, Alexander said.

Elmer, on hearing all this, seemed befuddled. "I carried very little insurance and I don't know exactly what I can do now," he said.

He had not applied for a Chapter 91 license during the amnesty period, so that is another hurdle he will have to face, Rauschenbach told him during the Friday tour.

Elmer, after meeting with Rauschenbach and Delahunt, said he didn't register what they were saying. "It went over my head," he said. "They know what they're talking about, but I don't."

One town official, who asked to be unnamed, said, "It's clear that we're going to have to take Dale by the hand and lead him through this rebuilding process.

Bergman said the town is committed to helping Lemon and Elmer rebuild. "We promised one-stop shopping, a coordinated approach to rebuilding, and we'll carry that out," he said.

Once Elmer comes up with an engineered plan for his properties, showing the lot lines and the historic high tide line, then all the town regulatory boards will meet at the same time to review those plans, said Roger Dias, building inspector.

The facade of Provincetown Theatre torn down

There were tears and looks of disbelief on February 11 as the wrecking ball on Mike Winkler's crane brought down the red brick and concrete facade of Whaler's Wharf, undoing in several hours a handsome, sturdy structure that had stood since 1919 when the building opened as the Provincetown Theater, the town's first movie house.

This was no ordinary facade.

It kept the fire from spreading out, protecting the historic wooden Universalist Unitarian Meeting House across from it on Commercial Street.

It kept the raging fire that destroyed Whaler's Wharf from crossing the Front Street, as Commercial is called, forcing it out the east and west sides of the building to consume the Handcrafter and cause extensive damage to Marine Specialties.

It forced the fire south toward the harbor where it attacked the Crown & Anchor Motor Inn on its western flank and rear, destroying most of this handsome, historic three-story wooden structure.

Bill Ingraham came out of retirement as wiring inspector as the fire raged at its fiercest to turn on the valve in the basement of the Crown that activated the water curtain. This curtain, which poured a constant stream of water down the west side of the Crown, preserved the front of the Crown and its historic facade from the

flames as they poured from the Handcrafter next door.

"If that brick facade of Whaler's Wharf hadn't been there, who knows what would have happened," said Police Chief Robert P. Anthony. "That brick facade held back a lot of the flame. Instead of it coming forward, it went sideways."

With the fire extinguished, public safety required the demolition of the brick facade. That was the opinion of Deputy Fire Chief Warren Alexander. Town Manager Keith Bergman, realizing the trauma many would feel to see the facade torn down, called in John Bologna, a structural engineer, to access the situation.

Bologna "dropped everything and came down to look it over," said Roger Dias, building inspector. "He looked at it from every angle and came to the conclusion that we could save it if we wanted to, but it might be cost-prohibitive to brace it until the building could be rebuilt. He said you couldn't guarantee that you wouldn't have a strong wind to knock it over, since it was just a free-standing structure"

Bergman, as commissioner of public safety, decided that the facade would have to go after Bologna said it was "questionable" if it would be able to withstand a strong wind.

"I supported that decision, but it was so sad to walk past

Continued to page 28

The facade of Provincetown Theatre torn down

Continued from page 1

there and see the rubble. It's one thing to say it has to come down for public safety, but it's another thing to actually see the rubble," Bergman said.

As firemen fought the blaze, spectators were kept back out of fear that the facade would topple and crush them. But as Winkler's crane with its large wrecking ball made its first stab at knocking the facade down, it bounced off the brick as if it were a yarn ball being batted by a cat.

The wrecking ball had no problem knocking down the red brick walls on either side of the facade, which were only one brick deep.

But the facade with its arch made of concrete in seven scored sections was another matter.

"Winkler had this great big ball on the end of his crane and it just bounced off the facade," said Dias. "It wasn't doing anything. It turned out to be a lot stronger than we thought it was."

Peter Cook, a Provincetown native who, like Anthony, spent many a day watching movies at the theater behind that facade, felt rage when he saw the wrecking ball finally manage to chip the facade down.

"It makes you sick to see that come down," he said. "I'm so mad I could spit. Where was our historical commission?"

Roger Keene, chairman of the historical commission, was close to tears himself when he learned the facade would have to come down. "We'll never get it back once it goes down," he said.

Dale Elmer, who purchased the building in 1977 for \$100,000, and converted it into Whaler's Wharf, said he would like to restore the facade if possible.

"We have photographs we could work with to put it back together," he said, as he surveyed the huge pile of rubble containing the red bricks and broken sections of the concrete arch.

Whaler's Wharf

981902ADV6

watchman tries suicide

David Bragdon, the 65-year-old watchman at Whaler's Wharf who discovered the fire as it got underway and was the first to report it, apparently attempted to commit suicide last Wednesday afternoon by firing a flare into his mouth, police said.

Truro police and rescue units were notified at 3:04 p.m. that a car was burning on Route 6. On arrival, they found Bragdon's car ablaze just off the road between Sonny's garage and Head of the Meadow Beach.

Police Chief John Thomas said it appeared the car fire started because Bragdon shot a flare gun into his mouth. He said the flare gun, usually made of plastic, was not recovered.

"It went up with the car," said Thomas.

Thomas said Bragdon was transported to Cape Cod Hospital. A spokesman at the hospital said Bragdon was brought to the emergency room where he was

Continued to page 26

Whaler's Wharf

watchman tries suicide

Continued from page 3

treated and not admitted. Thomas said he did not expect to file any charges against Bragdon. He said under common law it was illegal to attempt to commit suicide and fail, but the courts no longer enforce common law.

Bragdon, a Korean War veteran, returned to Provincetown Friday and sought out Dale Elmer to apologize for the fire. Elmer, who had been trying to contact Bragdon since learning of his suicide attempt, said he accepted the apology. "What could I say," he said.

"I know Dave has some problems, but he did a very good job for me. He cleaned the place well and he spent his spare time doing his artwork. He's been a reliable person over the years."

Whaler's Wharf had fire extinguishers in every corner capable of handling electrical fires such as this one, plus oil, grease and gas fires, Roger Dias, building inspector said.

"All Bragdon had to do was grab one of them and aim it at the fire, but instead he tried to smother an electrical fire with a blanket, which can't be done. If he'd been told what to do if there was a fire, those buildings would be standing today."

Police Chief Robert P. Anthony said Bragdon probably panicked and didn't think to grab the fire extinguisher. "A lot of people would panic in a situation like that," he said.

Fire sale draws a winter crowd to Marine Specialties

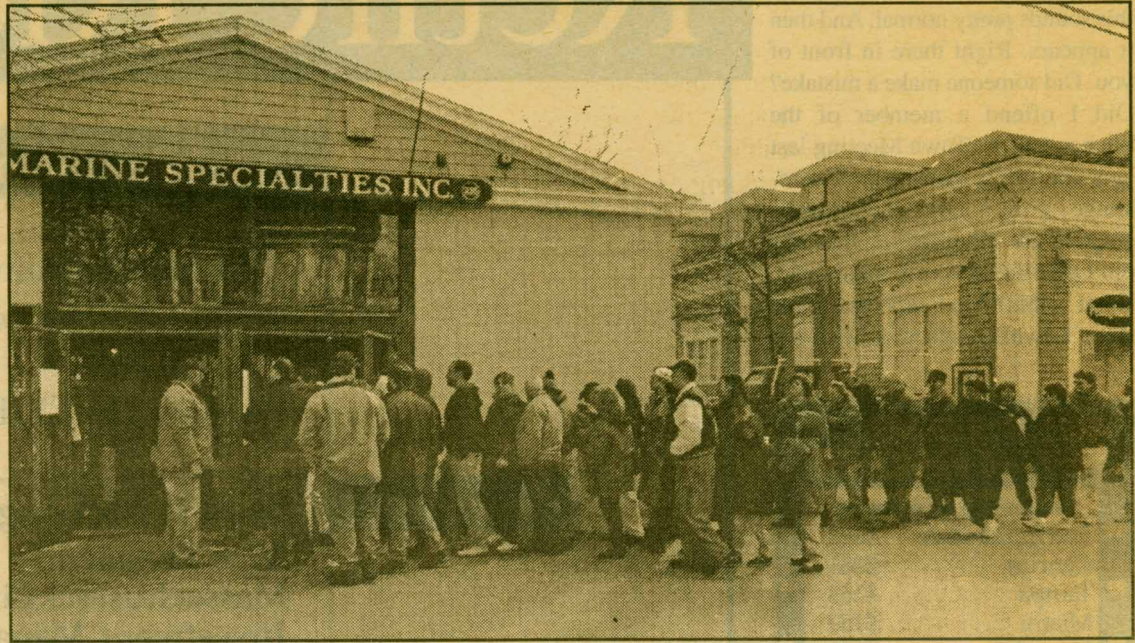
When Dawn Dykeman opened up Yardarm Liquors as usual, 9 am Saturday morning, she knew in a hurry that the rest of the day would be anything but her usual Saturday in February. "At 9:10, I had kids in here from New Hampshire," she says, asking me where the fire was. "Can you believe driving four hours to look at that?"

Toby Everett was passing by Marine Specialties around noon, and stopped to look at the people lined up waiting to get into the store. "I know it's black-humored," he said, "but I told the Town Manager they should start charging for parking again."

Vincent Pacellini was the doorman at Marine Specialties most of the day. He wasn't checking I.D.s or pitching the crowd to stop in for a big show. It was just so crowded in there that the Patricks needed to hold people back a bit. "The line's been here since they opened," he said. At 1 p.m. there were 25 people waiting, more joining all the time.

Brian O'Malley, the town doc, was one of those waiting to get in. Call it coincidence or karma, but he found himself witnessing the crucial moments of this catastrophe; he was downtown when the fire broke out, he was nearby when the car burned, and when the wrecking ball showed up to take down the old movie theater facade of Whaler's Wharf, he stood and watched that, too. "I'll tell you, that wall did not want to come down," he said, shaking his head ruefully. "They had to slam one of those huge wrecking balls into it over and over again to finally knock it over."

Inside, the front of Marine Specialties looked and felt much as ever, stacked and piled with stuff and more stuff. But there was the invisible clinging hint everywhere of something very wrong, the pervasive smell of smoke. The sign on the side of the upright piano in the mid-



A line forms outside Marine Specialties on Saturday morning.

Photo Vincent Guadagno

Banner 2-19-1998

dle of one of the aisles almost felt unnecessary: "FIRE SALE — 50 percent off all merchandise." Beside the piano, a space heater blasted away on the floor.

Irene Seipt was passing among the boots and army helmets, the gas masks and rugs, the blankets and jackets and pants and hats. She had picked out a few of those colorful bands people put around their heads to keep their ears warm. "Russell sent me in for a certain kind of block and tackle he wants," she said. "He swears it's here, and I've been looking, but who knows if I'll find it."

Paul Laporte was fingering a pair of woolen gloves. "I probably shouldn't say this," he mumbled, "but I kind of like the smell." In which case, the deeper he ventured into the store, the more he had to like. All the way at the back, Jacob McKean had a laundry bag full of stuff that he was plunking down at one of the cash registers. "Candles, summer shorts, a skirt for my girl-

friend, a rain coat, binoculars — look at this nice shirt, man, you should get one of these." He waited while the total got figured. "Time to go to Mama's," he smiled, giving his purchases a sniff. He didn't

mean his own mama; he meant the

Seth Rolbein

laundry service.

It was "Tiss" Souza doing the figuring for Jacob, and there was something very appropriate about that. Tiss had worked at Marine Specialties for 21 years, then stopped in 1991. This was his first time behind the counter since, and he was there just helping out as he could. "You name it, they're buying it," Tiss reported. "Knives is a big one. Not a lot of boat stuff this time of year. A lot of clothing." He paused, and looked around. "I remember the last fire," he said. "It was June 1977." That time they set tables up outside and were selling everything they could. The damage had been bad then, too.

Both Robert Patrick and Patrick

Patrick were standing behind Tiss. "Since 8:30 this morning," said Robert, meaning when the sale started. But of course there was no joy in it. He stepped out the open back door, which let in the cold but let out some of the smoky smell. The damage had been bad, maybe even worse than the Patricks had thought. But there was another truth, too; in that amazing conflagration, no human life was lost. And so, on a sunny February Saturday, Provincetown could find itself doing the things it has learned to do so well; bringing visitors into town, buying and selling, stopping each other on Commercial Street with a little something to say, cramming the long view and the short view side by side in the same tightly packed picture.

That night, the restaurants were jamming with the Valentine's crowd, so we grabbed a little chair near the bar and ordered appetizers. Maybe it was the toasted croutons, maybe it was the anchovies, but somehow even the Caesar's salad smelled like smoke.



Letters

Time for a historic district

To the editor:

Like those in Provincetown who witnessed first-hand the conflagration which destroyed the Crown & Anchor Motor Inn and Whaler's Wharf, and those, like myself, who saw the fiery spectacle on the television, I was very saddened to see two more architecturally and historically significant buildings in ruins. Because the natural beauty and especially the architecture of the town are so very fragile, it is imperative that something be done to curtail the visual erosion that has been taking place during the mid-20th century on. It is now time for the citizens of the town and the Board of Selectmen to establish a historic district in the downtown area, at least. And if that cannot be done, then appoint a Design Review Board to assist property owners with renovations to existing buildings and architects of future structures (if any). And it is not too early to think of what will take the places of the recently burned buildings. Perhaps an open vista to the spectacular harbor with a nicely designed tree-shaded park with comfortable benches and tables and appropriate period street light-

ing might be a suitable replacement. The addition of visually informative, non-destructible, well-designed panels with historic photographs would be a wonderful addition to the town, and present its history in a central out-of-doors location (but hopefully not off-street parking). This is an opportunity not to be missed!

John Hardy Wright
Salem

[Editor's note: John Hardy Wright is the author of "Provincetown Volume 1," a book of historic photographs of the town included in Arcadia Publishing's Images of America series.]

History-making heroism

To the editor:

This letter is written with such high praise for the combined efforts of many fire departments at the holocaust on Tuesday night. As a retired firefighter who fought several big Commercial Street fires many years ago (Corner Gift Shop and Shaloms), I really respect their courage and tenacity in fighting this huge fire. The conflagration as seen from the high school was certainly intimidating.

The disposition of so many firefighting trucks and personnel around the fire and the town to take care of the many small fires started by burning embers was in itself outstanding. Cape Cod can be proud of the Barnstable County system of coordinating this type of mutual aid

and yet providing coverage for each town that sent trucks and people to our aid. What a formidable task.

The fact that there were no serious injuries says a lot for the training of these people.

We had three sons fighting this fire and our prayers were for their safety as well as for everyone else involved. This fire will go down in history!

We do send our thanks to everyone who was involved in this mighty effort and our prayers for the Fire Captain from Yarmouth, the man injured from Orleans, and David Bragdon who must have felt so responsible.

The Cape Cod Fire and Rescue units should be praised. It is their untiring efforts that let us all sleep safely nights. Thank you all!

Carl and Pat Sawyer
Provincetown

They saved the town

To the editor:

This is a copy of a letter sent to the Board of Fire Engineers:

On behalf of the business community of Provincetown I wanted to express my most heartfelt thanks to you and the entire Fire Department for your amazing work last night. Thanks to you and your volunteer firemen, our town was saved from what could easily have been a much more widespread disaster. Those of us who do business in this town and those of us who make Provincetown our home feel safer this morning

continued on next page

with the knowledge that your department is here to protect us, our businesses and our lives.

I would also like to extend my deepest gratitude to the Fire Departments from our neighboring towns (which I understand includes every department on Cape Cod) for coming to our assistance. While we sometimes feel isolated here at the end of the Cape, it is more than reassuring to know that when we are in need, we are not alone.

Gary Reinhardt, President
Provincetown Business Guild

Abundance of optimism

To the editor:

I was so deeply saddened to hear about the devastating fire that ravaged our beloved town last evening [Feb. 10]. It will take an extraordinary effort to recover and for life to return to normal. However, Provincetown and its people are extraordinary! If there's any town on this planet that has the potential to come together to recover, rebuild and heal, it would have to be Provincetown.

We who call it the home of our hearts and all the year-round residents know we have the tenacity as an exceptionally special community to come together with an abundance of optimism and hope and overcome this terrible loss of such a grand part of our town.

Patrick Francis Murphy
Boston and Provincetown

Banner 2-19-1998

A Tribute to Firefighters.

A FIREMAN'S PRAYER

WHEN I AM CALLED TO DUTY, GOD,
WHEREVER FLAMES MAY RAGE;
GIVE ME STRENGTH TO SAVE SOME LIFE,
WHATEVER BE ITS AGE.
HELP ME EMBRACE A LITTLE CHILD
BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE;
OR SAVE AN OLDER PERSON FROM
THE HORROR OF THAT FATE.
ENABLE ME TO BE ALERT
AND HEAR THE WEAKEST SHOUT,
AND QUICKLY AND EFFICIENTLY,
TO PUT THE FIRE OUT.
I WANT TO FILL MY CALLING AND
TO GIVE THE BEST IN ME;
TO GUARD MY EVERY NEIGHBOR AND
PROTECT HIS PROPERTY.
AND IF ACCORDING TO YOUR WILL
I HAVE TO LOSE MY LIFE,
PLEASE BLESS WITH YOUR PROTECTING HAND,
MY CHILDREN AND MY WIFE.



Saying thanks on behalf of the Banner and its advertisers, Banner publisher Alix Ritchie (right) emphasized the Banner's commitment to community service as she presented a check for \$1,100 to Adam Wolf, president of the Provincetown Fireman's Association while (left to right) Joe Notaro, Russell Zawaduk, James Roderick, Jr. and Warren Alexander look on.

PROVINCETOWN
BANNER

2-19-1998

98 1902 CCT

Four P'town firefighters to be charged

■ Volunteers are angry the police didn't handle looting informally.

By K.C. MYERS
STAFF WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — Fire Chief Michael Trovato says department members are ready to walk out if serious charges are brought against fellow firefighters for stealing from the scene of the Feb. 10 fire on Commercial Street.

Trovato, on vacation in Florida until Monday, said in a phone interview that some people may have made mistakes and taken jewelry, bricks and other objects as mementos from the fire, thinking they were going to be discarded anyway. He said the police are out of line accusing volunteer firefighters of theft.

"Yes, what they did was wrong, but I have no crooks, no thieves, on



MICHAEL TROVATO
"...I have no crooks, no thieves, on my department"

my department," Trovato said. Provincetown Police Chief Robert Anthony said four Provincetown firefighters and two civilians will be summonsed today by the district attorney's office to answer

Please see **LOOTING** /A-6

LOOTING

Continued from A-1

accusations they took items from the debris.

Police have recovered about 200 objects, including \$5 pottery items with price tags still intact, and silver jewelry, from the firefighters and civilians.

First Assistant District Attorney Michael O'Keefe would not say what charges are pending.

The people are being summonsed rather than arrested in order to "lessen the drama of this to some degree," O'Keefe said.

"This is a very unfortunate mess. I want to say something about the valiant behavior of the firefighters," O'Keefe said.

Nevertheless, accusations against the firefighters have ignited tension between the police and the fire department in this small town. Trovato blasted the police for resorting to the court system rather than speaking directly to the men with whom they worked side by side during the cleanup of the \$6 million fire.

Trovato said some of the firefighters took jewelry, bricks or trinkets from the debris of the Whaler's Wharf Mall. It was done in broad daylight and in full view of state troopers. They did not know they were committing a crime, he said.

The Provincetown force is the only all-volunteer department on Cape Cod. It has about 67 members who are paid a stipend between \$300 and \$750 a year depending on their duties.

The chief said there was nothing in the department's rules and regulations about taking objects, even as tokens, from a fire scene.

"Why couldn't the police chief say, 'Look, you fools, don't you know you're not supposed to take anything from the fire?' Maybe they needed a little reminder," Trovato said. "Why not bring down a state trooper to scare the daylights out of these guys? That would teach them a lesson."

In this modern world of overtime pay and union contracts, the volunteer department operates in the old-fashioned, small-town way, Trovato said.

"If there's a problem, any of these guys come to my house and we solve it. We don't go through all that b.s. they go through at the police station," he said.

Police Chief Anthony said it is hard to accuse firefighters, but, "It's not my job to decide criminal intent. I do the investigating, they have recourse through the courts. I'm not the judge and the jury."

Taking objects from a fire is a felony that carries a maximum penalty of five years in jail, he said.

But Trovato said police brought charges against one firefighter — a

Victims may get federal loans

PROVINCETOWN — Gov. Paul Cellucci yesterday asked for a federal disaster designation that will allow low-interest loans for people who lost their businesses in the Feb. 10 fire.

According to the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, more than 25 businesses qualify for relief from the Small Business Administration.

The loans would carry interest rates of 4 percent. A Small Business Administration representative could be in Provincetown as early as next week to survey the damage. Loan officers could be there by the end of the month to take loan applications, said E. Winn Davis, Provincetown assistant town

manager. The applications by jewelers, craftspersons and others displaced at the Crown & Anchor Motor Inn and the Whaler's Wharf Mall indicate that more than 40 homes and businesses were damaged.

Provincetown officials are meeting today to discuss rebuilding with the property owners. The building, inspections and health boards have agreed to hold joint public hearings on reconstruction applications in order to make the process move as quickly as possible, said Town Manager Keith Bergman.

— K.C. MYERS

prominent businessman in town — for taking a cheap wooden sculpture of a fisherman that floated out the door of Marine Specialties the day after the fire. Trovato said Robert Patrick, the owner of the store, was right there when it happened and did not object.

Another accused firefighter took jewelry for his children to play with because he was told by the backhoe operator that everything was

going into the trash bin, Trovato said.

A firefighter recovered the carved wooden sign for the store Metamorphosis when it was going to be crushed by the wrecking ball and took it to the fire station, Trovato said. And a firefighter took one unopened can of Heineken from the Crown & Anchor Motor Inn and gave it to another firefighter.

Firemen, others facing grand jury for looting

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Several Provincetown firemen, who have been cited as heroes for fighting the February 10 fire, now face criminal citations as common thieves, looters of fire scene property they were sworn to protect.

Provincetown Police Chief Robert P. Anthony Tuesday said his department, along with the State Fire Marshal's office and State Police are investigating allegations of improper conduct by firemen — and civilians at the fire scene.

The investigation is ongoing and no further information will be released until the allegations are either proved or disproved, he said, during a press conference called by Town Manager Keith Bergman.

Warren G. Alexander, deputy fire chief, who orchestrated the 245 firemen who fought the

blaze, said the board of fire engineers is also investigating the allegations.

"In no way has the board ever condoned intentional inappropriate behavior" at a fire scene," he said.

Anthony relayed the results of his investigation Tuesday to Michael O'Keefe, first assistant district attorney.

O'Keefe said after that meeting the investigation is continuing and that he would have no comment today or Friday

"My men are not criminals," said Fire Chief Michael Trovato from Florida where he is on a vacation that has turned into a nightmare.

The loot, which Anthony showed to reporters spread out on a table at the police station, included 150 silver-plated necklaces and 100 silver-plated bracelets, many of them still in plastic wrappers with price stickers ranging from \$8 to \$12.

The recovered items included about 16 brightly colored small pieces of pottery, 13 colored ring stones, a large block of pale green glass, the Metamorphosis sign and a Linda Tennyson sign, both of which came

Grand jury

Continued from page 1

from Whaler's Wharf.

Dale Elmer, owner of Whaler's Wharf, confirmed that these items were taken from his property. He said he identified the jewelry and other items at the police station Sunday. The jewelry, with an average price tag of \$12, "probably cost me half of that to buy," he said.

The recovered items include a single unopened can of Heinekin beer, which is believed to have been taken by a Provincetown fireman from the Crown & Anchor.

The original police report of this theft, said Trovato, was that Alexander took the beer from the Crown and gave it to Truro Fire Chief Tom Prada. It was not Alexander, but another Provincetown fireman who allegedly took the beer and gave it to Prada as a souvenir, Trovato said.

Prada turned the can over to police during the investigation. If police could make a mistake like this, it's possible they've made other assumptions about looting that will be proved untrue, he said.

Looting from a fire scene is a felony, regardless of the value of the stolen objects, punishable by a prison sentence of up to five years, a jail sentence of up to two years, and/or a \$500 fine, Anthony said. "It's a crime to take anything from a fire scene," he said.

District Fire Chief Joe Notaro said Tuesday that he understands firemen had permission to remove the bricks from the rubble as souvenirs. Another recovered item is a wooden carved statue of a fireman, with a \$24 price tag, that police claim a Provincetown fireman took from Marine Specialties.

The fireman was "dragged into the police station and read his rights" on Friday, Trovato said. The fireman maintains he told the store clerk he was going to pay for the statue, Trovato said.

One Provincetown fireman, when he was asked by a detective to corroborate looting by another fireman, told the detective that he had taken an item

from the fire scene as a souvenir, Notaro said. The fireman volunteered this information, then found himself accused of looting.

The joint investigation includes firemen in Truro, Hyannis and possibly Eastham, Trovato said. "At the most, this involves poor judgment on the part of five or six of my men," he said.

The biggest stash of jewelry, he said, was taken by an out-of-town fireman at a time when he was on the scene, not as a fireman, but as an employee working for an excavator.

A Provincetown firefighter did take about 30 bracelets from the rubble home to his children to play with, Trovato said. "He thought it was junk and that it was going to end up in the dumpster. There was no criminal intent on the part of my men," he said.

"They showed bad judgment, but they are not criminals. These are men who worked 27 hours straight. They're paid \$400 a year by the town, and they're on call 24 hours a day. They were picking up this stuff in broad daylight. The police, who were on duty and being paid by the town, didn't say anything. They could have told them to stop what they were doing, but the police didn't say a thing until they came knocking on doors and bringing men into the station for questioning like they were criminals.

"My men are in tears about this," he said. "I haven't slept myself since my sister called me the night of the fire."

The allegations "are serious and if they are true, a price may have to be paid for it," said Notaro. "But until the investigation is completed, we don't know what's true. The fire department is like a family. We tend to stick together.

"If someone is in trouble, we do what we can to help. If someone in the family makes a mistake we're a forgiving outfit if we think there's reason to be. We stick together. That's why we've been such a successful outfit for 150 years. But we do not condone anything done illegally.

"We're trying to hold the gang together and, hopefully, all of these issues will get resolved and no one will get too hurt."

Trovato said he has talked by phone with Anthony and Bergman.

Anthony, he said, is determined to seek indictments. "He's like a brick about this," he said. "My guys don't need to be read their Miranda rights and treated like criminals. If they did something wrong, something stupid, the police should have called them all together and told them to bring the stuff back.

"It should never have gotten to this point. Bobby called me Sunday and said he knows there was no criminal intent, but that the investigation has to go on and it has to be left to the grand jury to decide that. But by then, their names will be ruined," he said.

Provincetown's volunteer firefighters "are my heroes and they're your heroes," Bergman said Tuesday. "We do support our firefighters."

Editorial**Felling a monster**

2-19-98

The Provincetown Fire Dept. and all the firefighters of Cape Cod last week put out the worst fire this town has seen in recent memory and prevented much more damage from occurring. Their performance was a masterpiece of cool-headed strategy, as the beast was encircled, stopped from moving forward, and then pushed back a foot at a time. There were no mighty blows, just millions of watery pinpricks surgically administered, but the effect was much the same. Just three hours after it had come to "life," this monster had fallen to its knees and the town breathed a huge sigh of relief.

Now comes the troubling news that some firefighters are being accused of taking items from the fire scene. Whatever the investigation ultimately reveals, this certainly does not involve every firefighter and takes nothing away from the valiant, professional-caliber effort exhibited last week. The individuals who may have erred should answer for their actions. The collective pride of the firefighters should remain intact.

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FROM PAGE ONE

Flexibility seen in sentence options

By **KAREN JEFFREY**
STAFF WRITER

The six men charged with stealing jewelry, pottery and artifacts from the remains of three buildings damaged in the Provincetown fire Feb. 10 are due to be arraigned in Orleans District Court on March 13.

All six could end up in jail if convicted of what has been called everything from a lapse in judgment to outright thievery.

All six men have been charged with stealing from a fire scene. Conviction of this felony can result in a maximum penalty of five years in state prison. It is a law created years ago by the legislature in an effort to recognize the particular kind of vulnerability that victims of fires experience, according to Cape and Islands District Attorney Philip A. Rollins.

But it is also a law that covers the spectrum of such theoretical crimes as a firefighter stealing a \$25,000 fur coat following a fire in a Newberry Street boutique to the firefighter who picks up a can of beer from the scene of a barroom blaze.

How this law will be applied to the six men accused in Provincetown will be played out in Barnstable County courtrooms with input from the district attorney's office, defense attorneys and a judge who, if the men are convicted, will ultimately decide whether probation, community service, the county jail or state prison is the most appropriate.

But added to this mix is the fact that the men have also been charged with larceny.

Three of the men — Joel Macara, Paul Dion and Paul Silva — are each charged with larceny under \$250. This is a misdemeanor charge that can be adju-

icated in a district court.

The other men — Timothy Rose, Agapito Canela and Gerard Menangas — have each been charged with larceny over \$250, a felony that can be prosecuted in either district court or Superior Court.

Superior Court is generally reserved for the most serious cases that can result in a state prison sentence.

District court has jurisdiction over misdemeanors and some felonies, but the maximum penalty for a district court conviction is 2½ years in a county jail for any case tried in the district court.

Whether the charges against the six men charged yesterday remain in district court or are transferred to Superior Court will depend upon the "facts and circumstances of each case," said First Assistant District Attorney Michael O'Keefe.

"These two charges allow the district attorney and the court some flexibility in adjudication in either the district court or the Superior Court. It allows the district attorney to look at the situation and make an appropriate recommendation to the court," he said.

The process of summoning the six men rather than sending police to arrest them was nothing out of the ordinary. Every day people are summonsed into district courts, he said.

"The process of summoning or arresting turns on the question of significant flight risk, whether or not the person has roots in the community and is likely to appear in court when summonsed or whether that person is likely to flee the jurisdiction," he said.

"Common sense dictates these people have roots in the community and are most likely to appear in court to answer the summons," he said.



Staff Photo by RON SCHLOERB

■ Cape fire chiefs gather at the Harwich station yesterday to plan Provincetown coverage if volunteers there refuse to answer the bell.

Bill for coverage could hit \$8,600 a day

By SEAN POLAY
and K.C. MYERS
STAFF WRITERS

HARWICH — Cape Cod fire chiefs are preparing for the worst should Provincetown's volunteer firefighters quit because of theft charges brought against some of them.

The threat was made Wednesday by Provincetown Fire Chief Michael Trovato.

The Barnstable County Fire Chiefs Association met yesterday in Harwich to draw up a plan to provide 24-hour fire service to the town if its 67 volunteer firefighters quit.

"First, let me say we hope and urge the department not to do that," Chatham Fire Chief

William Schwerdtfeger said. "We hope they will continue to serve the community in the excellent fashion that they have in the past. But we have to be proactive about this, and we impressed that upon the selectmen, who insisted on this approach."

Please see **CHIEFS** /A-12

CHIEFS

Four Provincetown firefighters were among six charged yesterday with stealing \$3,700 worth of jewelry and pottery from the Whaler's Wharf fire scene last week.

Trovato defended his firefighters in an interview with the Times on Wednesday, saying none were thieves or crooks. He said the department was prepared to quit if charges were leveled against any of them.

Trovato, on vacation in Florida until Monday, could not be reached yesterday for comment. Deputy Fire Chief Warren Alexander said he does not think there will be a full-scale walkout.

"We're confident the department will pull together," Alexander said.

But preparations are under way — just in case.

"Even if it was said in the heat of the moment, it is so serious it was

enough to mobilize all the state and local fire departments," Town Manager Keith Bergman said yesterday.

The ramifications would be serious and potentially deadly given Provincetown's remote location and structural layout, Schwerdtfeger said.

Logistically, it's uncertain what form a walkout would take, since the firefighters are volunteers and under no contract with the town, Bergman said.

Ordinarily, a large fire in Provincetown requires activation of the county's mutual aid system, causing a shift of men and equipment from several Lower Cape departments. In turn, still more departments are called to cover the departments heading to Provincetown. For the Commercial Street fire Feb. 10, the shifting of fire resources to the scene caused almost every Cape department — and some from off-Cape — to get involved.

"A reactive approach would be

time and distance intensive," Schwerdtfeger said. "And without an initial cadre of people to fight a fire, it could be devastating to that community, and there could even be loss of life. That's why we want to be proactive about this."

Schwerdtfeger said the Barnstable County chiefs agreed yesterday to prepare to put personnel and apparatus in Provincetown on a 24-hour basis. The cost, estimated at \$8,600 per day, would be paid by Provincetown taxpayers.

"We expect all departments on the Cape to participate," Schwerdtfeger said. "And it will be done with a minimal impact on each department manpower-wise, and zero impact, or close to that, financially."

Prior to the meeting of the county chief's association late yesterday, Schwerdtfeger met in Provincetown with the board of fire engineers, selectmen, and representatives from the state fire marshal's office and the Fire Chiefs Association of Massachusetts.



Times Photo by VINCE GUADAZNO

■ Rescue personnel attend to David Bragdon on a float between MacMillan Wharf and Fisherman's Pier yesterday in Provincetown.

Provincetown still in shock; watchman tries suicide again

■ For many residents, the fire, its aftermath and accusations are too much to handle.

By K.C. MYERS
STAFF WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — Police and firefighters crowded together on a small float yesterday in the harbor to try to save the caretaker of Whaler's Wharf Mall, who attempted suicide for a second time since the fire on Feb. 10.

David Bragdon, 65, the night watchman of the mall where the fire started, was in stable condition last night in the intensive care unit of Cape Cod Hospital. Bragdon jumped off Fishermen's Pier at about 1:30 p.m. He had weights attached to his legs, said Chris

■ **NO FIRE FIGHT:** The threat of a walkout by Provincetown volunteer firefighters has waned. /A-3

King, a fisherman, who pulled him from the water with the help of his brother, Willis King.

Townpeople gathered at the rear of the water's edge to watch the drama as police and firefighters worked together to save a man obviously broken by the fire and its aftermath.

"This has shaken the town to its core," said Bob Cahill, a resident. "I know we all should have somehow handled this differently, but I don't know how."

After Bragdon first attempted to end his life with a flare gun on Feb. 11, maybe he should have been made to get psychological help, said Cahill.

"We should have helped him in some way," he said.

Please see **CARETAKER** /A-14

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FROM PAGE ONE

CARETAKER

Instead, Bragdon was treated and released from Cape Cod Hospital, with minor injuries.

A weightlifter and artist, who guarded the jewelry-filled mall at night for about 10 years until the night it went up in smoke, Bragdon said in earlier interviews that he blamed himself for the blaze that may have started with an electric heater.

Unfortunately, there was more going on the day after the fire than the psychological anguish of one man. Forty business owners and employees learned their jobs were lost, along with most of their inventory, costumes and computers. Total damages are estimated now at \$7.6 million, said Assistant Town Manager E. Winn Davis.

Only about six of those shopkeepers displaced from the Whaler's Wharf, the Handcrafter and the Crown & Anchor Motor Inn had insurance, according to information collected by the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

As these people combed through the blackened debris, firefighters and citizens were accused of taking undamaged boxes of jewelry, bricks and trinkets that belonged to the shop owners.

The items ranged from a \$25 wooden figure to jewelry valued at \$1,836 allegedly taken by a Truro firefighter who was working on the excavation crew at the time.

Nightly news broadcasts carried stories that shamed a proud fire department.

"It's very demoralizing," said Doreen Devlin, a Provincetown mental health counselor. "It was all over the Boston news. I was ashamed, when really we should be proud of our fire department.

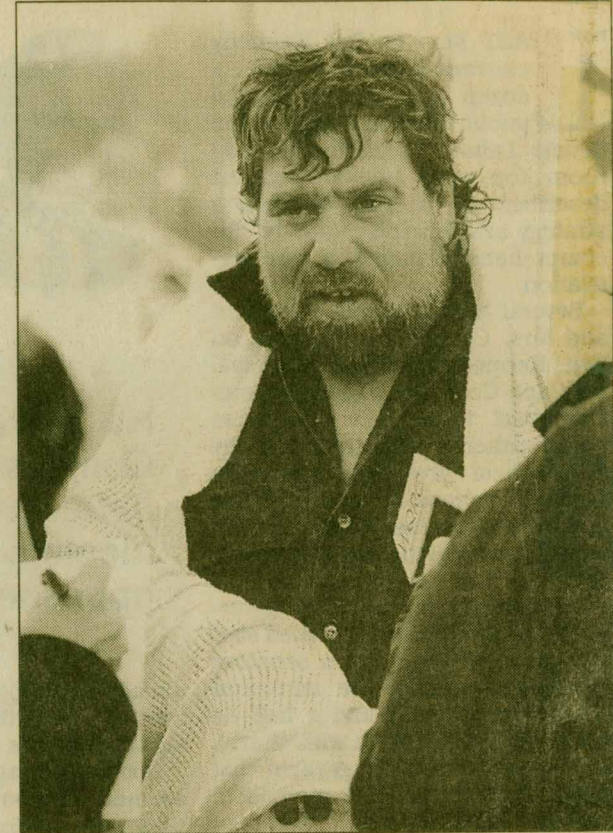
"The police chief (Robert Anthony) was in between a rock and a hard place," she said. "The firefighters are heroes. There should have been a better way to handle this instead of treating them like criminals."

Fire Chief Michael Trovato said his department had been betrayed by the police, who could have handled it differently. Trovato said some members of his department may have made mistakes, but there was no criminal intent.

Now Police Chief Robert Anthony, who was once a call firefighter himself and works closely with the fire department, found himself in an uncomfortable position. He said he had no choice but to investigate criminal complaints. Stealing from a fire scene is a felony.

The police and fire departments are in a lot of pain over this. So are the residents.

"Most people are just really sad," said David Eliseo,



Times Photo by VINCE GUADAZNO

■ Fisherman Chris King stands wrapped in a blanket after pulling David Bragdon, the Whaler's Wharf Mall night watchman, from Provincetown Harbor yesterday. Bragdon was in the intensive care unit at Cape Cod Hospital last night, listed in stable condition.

a Provincetown therapist who provided counseling for the fire victims.

"The fire was devastating enough," he said. "I know a lot of people who won't even walk by the huge hole left by there in the center of town.

Then there's David Bragdon and the firefighters' problems, he said. "Everything is just hitting at once."

Eliseo said the general public seems to enjoy bad-mouthing Provincetown, whether it's the diversity of the community or the fire department.

"It's like they want to believe we're not as much of a community as we think we are," he said. "But we are a good community. And we will rally. Right now, everyone is just in a state of shock."

Firefighter walkout unlikely

By K.C. MYERS
and SEAN POLAY
STAFF WRITERS

PROVINCETOWN — A walkout by the all-volunteer Provincetown Fire Department appears unlikely despite an earlier threat that firefighters would quit if colleagues were charged with stealing property from the rubble of previous week's fire on Commercial Street.

Town Manager Keith Bergman met with most of the department Thursday night to dissuade them from quitting. By the end of the evening, he said, he got the message from the firefighters that they would not walk off the job. They will wait for any further decisions to be made after the Fire Chief Michael Trovato returns Monday from vacation.

"I felt much better by the end of the night," Bergman said.

Earlier in the day, four Provincetown firefighters were among six people charged yesterday with stealing \$3,700 worth of jewelry and pottery from the Whaler's Wharf fire scene last week.

In between that and the firefighters meeting, the Barnstable County Fire Chiefs Association met in Harwich to devise a plan to provide the town with round-the-clock fire service coverage in case Provincetown firefighters decided to quit.

Trovato and other firefighters had told the Times earlier in the week that the department was prepared to walk out if theft charges were brought against any of them. But his remarks could have been made in the heat of the moment.

Joe Notaro, district chief for Engine Company 3, said yesterday the department will stand together.

"There was never any real danger of the whole department walking out," Notaro said. "I think a lot of the fellows have a right to be angry and they are expressing that anger. But when the chips are down, they are always there."

Notaro also said those charged with stealing likely will not be asked to leave the department.

"We're all one big family," he said. "That's the secret of a successful volunteer fire department. Right or wrong, if someone has gone astray in the past, we're a forgiving family."

"We've been blindsided by this," Notaro added. "But we have a good group. History speaks for itself, for God's sake. We've been a good, solid honorable department for 150 years."

After fire, businesses face deadline

■ Provincetown owners must rebuild within a year to avoid stricter requirements.

By MIKE IACUessa
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — If Whaler's Wharf is to be rebuilt economically, it will have to happen within a year, Assistant Town Manager E. Winn Davis told owner Dale Elmer and former merchants in the building Thursday.

Whaler's Wharf, which was demolished after the downtown fire that caused about \$7.6 million in damage last week, is grandfathered from meeting any new zoning requirements as long as construction begins within 12 months and the basic structure is completed within 24 months, Davis said.

The Crown & Anchor Motor Inn, the other major building heavily damaged in the fire, is partially salvageable.

Last week manager Rodney Reetz said he hoped the business could reopen by summer.

Both structures would have to meet new building code standards, including installation of elevators and new septic systems.

There is also a state law protecting public access to the waterfront that may prevent rebuilding the portion of Whaler's Wharf nearest the water.

The Crown & Anchor has a license to have property on the tide line, but Whaler's Wharf does not.

Davis advised those proposing to rebuild Whaler's Wharf to hire an engineer as quickly as possible so design plans can be evaluated for potential problems and delays.

"Time is your biggest enemy today," Davis said. "You need to identify where you can't comply so that you can get legislative relief."

State Sen. Henri Rauschenbach, who toured the fire site for the second time Thursday, has promised to try to get some relief to the laws, but Davis warned those problems have to be identified quickly because the Legislature adjourns in August.

Other help may be available. Acting Gov. Paul Cellucci has asked the Small Business Administration to declare Provincetown a disaster area and make low-interest federal loans available to affected businesses and residents.

In the expectation such a declaration will be made, the Small Business Administration will be in town next week to process loan applications, Davis said.

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So far, 32 applicants have qualified for emergency assistance under criteria set by the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency.

And the Craft Emergency Relief Fund, based in Montpelier, Vt., told the town it will make small-business loans available to craftsmen who lost their livelihoods in the fire. The relief fund can be reached at 802-229-2306.

One of the obstacles for rebuilding both buildings is expected to be septic systems, especially since the town may build a sewage system and negate the need for individual ones.

The septic system is expected to cost the Crown and Anchor close to \$400,000, but business owners in Whaler's Wharf were told Thursday that a smaller system might be acceptable for them, since the site houses mostly retail establishments, not living space.

Heroism isn't lost to looting

ANY lingering doubts about what happened after the Provincetown fire — looting or souvenir collecting — evaporated once the district attorney put the items on display.

When DA Philip Rollins pressed charges against six people, five of them firefighters, it could have exacerbated a bad situation but, instead, it cleared the air.

The facts were on the table; a couple of thousand dollars worth of necklaces, bracelets and pottery; no smoke damage, no tarnish, clean as a whistle.

"This isn't rubble," Rollins said.

"We're not talking about rubble."

There were also charred bricks, a beer can, part of the facade from the Crown and Anchor. Those were the valueless things that were mementos of the fire. No one is charged with stealing a



Mark
Sullivan

brick.

The items taken are valued at \$3,700.

As Rollins was announcing charges in the looting, area fire chiefs were making plans to ensure Provincetown fire protection.

This was because earlier the town's fire chief, Michael Trovato, said his volunteer fire department was ready to quite if some members were charged. He was in Florida at the time, supposedly relaxing. He had just missed the biggest fire to break out on his watch. And then after his firefighters acquitted themselves heroically, some of them were under suspicion.

ROLLINS characterized Trovato's remarks as "maybe an uncalled for statement made in the heat of battle."

Nevertheless, his loyal but inflammatory comments got the other chiefs working on the contingency plan. And it set up some straw men:

That the town might be without fire protection;

That the police department could have settled this across a kitchen table;

That the relationship between the police and fire departments is deeply ruptured;

That the efforts of firefighters the night of the fire are somehow sullied.

None of this has to be true.

Provincetown can be proud of its firefighters, and the firefighters all over the Cape who backed them up.

Townpeople can also be proud of Police Chief Robert Anthony who did not look the other way, but did the right thing.

"It's very difficult for me," he said. "The police and fire departments work closely."

And the district attorney decided not to make arrests. In a closely knit town that kind of treatment would have hardened positions.

As it is, Anthony said, "It will take a lot of community building to get on with it."

It shouldn't have to. All in all, it is a straightforward story, a mixture first of tragedy, then heroism, and finally temptation.

For those who saw the fire, smelled the smoke, and watched the volunteers throw themselves into a desperate battle to save the town, a couple of boxes of jewelry may seem irrelevant.

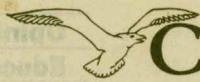
And because the men charged are well-known neighbors — a businessman, a coach, a PTA leader — that they could be accused of a felony is incomprehensible.

But you can't put the heroism of the fire on one side of a scale, the theft on the other, and balance things out.

They both happened, and they are unrelated.

As Anthony said, it's time to get on with it.

Mark Sullivan is the news columnist for the Cape Cod Times. His column appears Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday. He can be reached at 862-1284 or by e-mail: sullivan@capecodonline.com.



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IN OUR VIEW

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Saints and sinners

■ The Provincetown Fire Department faces a bigger challenge than last week's massive fire. They've got to stand tall once more.

IN ONE WEEK, Provincetown's fire department has soared to the heights of courage and valor, and plummeted to the depths of anger and shame.

The all-volunteer department fought the battle of their lives last week, containing the fire that destroyed the Crown and Anchor and the Whaler's Wharf Mall. And this week, they're back in the headlines, fighting a new battle against charges of looting at the fire scene.

The fire was epic and historic in its size and danger. Hundreds of firefighters, from all over the Cape, were called to the scene. It was a huge, five-alarm blaze that threatened to roll right down the Cape-tip town's tightly-packed historic waterfront, so filled with businesses and residences, almost all of aging, flammable wood.

That night, the town was fighting for its life. And its courageous firefighters won.

Today, some of those firefighters are battling for their honor and most of the department is feeling besieged. It's a battle they can win by staying on the job, and not abandoning the town they love and that loves them.

Five firefighters (four from Provincetown and one from Truro) and one civilian got summonses from the district attorney's office Thursday, calling them to court to answer charges that they took items from the fire debris.

The police say they took some jewelry, bricks, pottery and other items. In some cases, an insignificant item or two; in other cases, jewelry worth thousands of dollars. Fire Chief Michael Trovato says they did it out of ignorance, believing that what they took was salvage, otherwise destined to be thrown away with the rest of the fire rubble. They were taking souvenirs of the biggest blaze they were

likely ever to face, and had no idea they were violating the law, especially since the Provincetown Fire Department, the only all-volunteer department on the Cape, had no regulations about taking mementos from fire scenes (and shame on the chief for that).

But Provincetown Police Chief Robert Anthony says a crime is a crime, and ignorance of the law is no excuse. "It's not my job to decide criminal intent. I do the investigating, they have recourse through the courts. I'm not the judge and jury." No, he's not. The charges have cast a pall of shame over the proud fire department, but blaming Chief Anthony is pure scapegoating. What's a police chief to do if he finds a felony being committed in his jurisdiction? Look the other way?

Said Fire Chief Trovato: "Why couldn't the police chief say, 'Look, you fools, don't you know you're not supposed to take anything from the fire?' Maybe they needed a little reminder. Why not bring down a state trooper to scare the daylights out of these guys? That would teach them a lesson." He couldn't do it that way because, as District Attorney Philip Rollins put it, "... stealing is wrong. Just plain wrong."

It may be a case of small-town old ways running head-on into the letter-of-the-law modern times. And it's sad that this unfortunate episode couldn't have been solved by those old ways, which are sometimes more sensible. But there's another old-fashioned, small-town ethic in the background that could have kept all this from happening. It's the lesson every one of us learned at a very early age, most likely from our parents — you don't take what doesn't belong to you.

But what's done is done. The charges have been filed and the accused must show up in court. If people broke the law, they've got to take responsibility for their own actions and not whine about it.

For a few days, it looked like Provincetown's fire department would walk out in response to the charges. They haven't. And they can't. They've got to continue standing tall, just as they did last week on Commercial Street.

982402CET I

P'town says thanks to its local heroes

■ Residents praise firefighters, police and town officials for a job well done.

K.C. MYERS
STAFF WRITER

PROVINCETOWN — All the hurt and turmoil in this town since the Feb. 10 fire was transformed last night into powerful feelings of gratitude toward police, firefighters and officials who weathered a bizarre series of misfortunes bravely and professionally.

Last night was the first select-

men's meeting since the Whaler's Wharf fire that destroyed three historic buildings, caused \$7.6 million in damage and displaced about 40 employees and businesses. It also led to five firefighters being charged with looting.

And the caretaker of the Whaler's Wharf Mall remains in critical condition at Cape Cod Hospital after a second suicide attempt. David Bragdon apparently felt guilty for not preventing the fire.

Officials and citizens last night pierced the negativity by letting their gratitude well to the surface.

They said the real story is how the firefighters of Cape Cod saved

Please see **PRAISE** /A-8

PRAISE

Continued from A-1

most of the town. And then, despite serious peer pressure, the police stood up and did their jobs as well.

"I just want to let the public know that people did their job during the fire and did it well," Selectman Jane Antolini said. "This is not a case of taking sides. There were tremendous efforts all around and all this negative stuff is not the larger picture of what we are."

"Sometimes I look at the press and I say, 'Let it go, let it go. Soon it will be yesterday's news,'" Selectman Betty Steele-Jeffers said. "And it will be yesterday's news.

We will go on. And we will be a stronger community for it."

Soon after firefighters were accused of looting, the police were accused of betraying the firefighters for bringing the charges against them.

If townspeople have learned one lesson from all of this, it's the difficulty of both professions.

"I know what a wonderful fire department we have and I know what a wonderful police department we have," Selectman Mary-Jo Avellar said.

Town Manager Keith Bergman thanked E. Winn Davis, the assistant town manager, for coordinating the emergency relief effort.

Rick Murray, a businessman, ex-

pressed his thanks to Police Chief Robert Anthony for pressing ahead with an investigation that cast a different light on some of the town's heroes.

Murray said a lot of the people in the community support Anthony's position, and praise him for his level-headedness.

Barbara Rushmore, a community activist, heaped her thanks upon the town manager. She said Bergman stayed calm, stayed late and stayed "right there with us" throughout the ordeal.

"The firefighters deserve our thanks for saving the town, and the town leaders serve our thanks for saving our integrity," she said.

OBITUARY

David Bragdon, artist and property watchman, dies at 65

By Sue Harrison
BANNER STAFF

David Shepard Bragdon, 65, a 25-year Provincetown resident who was the night watchman at Whaler's Wharf died on Feb. 25. The cause of death will be attributed to Bragdon's suicide leap into the harbor on Feb. 20 but one could say that, indirectly, he died from the devastating fire at his job on Feb. 10.

Bragdon, who reported the blaze and tried to extinguish it unsuccessfully, never seemed to completely shake his feeling of dishonor in not being able to contain the fire, and his friends say that sense of honor led him to take his own life.

The State Fire Marshal's Office

ruled the fire accidental, but that apparently was not enough to relieve Bragdon's suffering. He attempted suicide the day after the fire and had been under a doctor's care since that incident.

Known to be a private, sensitive man who took his responsibilities seriously, Bragdon chose to live his life outside the mainstream experience. Many people, seeing his crusty exterior, would never have guessed how articulate he was or that he took winter forays to the Florida Everglades, where he studied the flora extensively and took photographs he later used as the basis for paintings. He kept a journal of his travels and thoughts and could discuss tropical plant species with a depth of knowledge.

"He needs more credit than he has been given," said former employer and 10-year friend Dale Elmer, the owner of Whaler's Wharf. "He spoke Latin, could quote Shakespeare at length and was well read in the classics." Elmer said Bragdon was a conscientious employee and added that it was hard to think of rebuilding and reopening the Wharf without him. "It's a waste of a life," he said.

Bragdon, a Syracuse, N.Y. native, was a Korean War veteran who served in the Army. During his tour of duty, he was awarded the Korean Service Medal, three Bronze Stars,

the United Nations Service Medal, the Army of the Occupation Medal (Japan), the National Defense Service Medal and two Overseas Bars.

He was also a fitness buff who lifted weights for most of his life and was interested in holistic health care. It was a combination of his extensive reading coupled with his weight training that led to many of his long-term friendships.

Arthur Reis said he first met Bragdon while both were lifting at the Community Center in 1973. Reis said Bragdon loved to work out and was a harmless, gentle soul who would give anyone the shirt off his back. "He read everything he could get his hands on," Reis said, "especially anatomy, physiology and history."

Shortly after Bragdon arrived in town, he also made friends with Elloyd Hanson and Joel Newman, owners of the Provincetown Bookshop. For years before there was a full-time gym in town, they said Bragdon would work out in their shop's basement. He also periodically stored his artwork with them and gave Hanson and Newman three of his bronze sculptures, including a nearly three-foot tall bust of the man who spread Buddhism through parts of Asia.

To create the paintings he had been doing recently, Bragdon made sketches of enlargements of his

Everglades and Florida Keys photographs, adding or deleting plant species and animals to create the balance he was looking for. He would then sometimes snip from several completed works, piece them together and have color prints made from the finished collage. Although he produced pastels and drawings, Bragdon worked primarily in acrylics in a style Elmer describes as "impressionistic realism."

Bragdon's weightlifting brought him another friend, Bobby Klein, owner of Galadriel's Mirror, the shop next door to the Bookshop. Klein, a lifter himself, said he heard loud noises and bangs from his neighbor's basement and found Bragdon in his makeshift gym. That encounter started the two men on their 20-year friendship.

"We were friends, good friends," Klein said. "We had the weightlifting in common, we traded books and took trips to Boston together. So many of the books I've read, Dave gave me. He was a very



Photo Sue Harrison

A bronze bust (nearly three feet tall) that is attributed to David Bragdon.

intelligent man. He could have been a philosopher or a professor like his father. He just expected too much from himself."

Funeral arrangements were private and handled by Hamel, Wickens and Troupe Funeral Home in Harwich. No information is available at this time regarding a local memorial service.



Photo Vincent Guadagno

Dave Bragdon

Back home, fire chief snuffs talk of walkout

By K.C. MYERS
STAFF WRITER

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Five firefighters looted from the Feb. 10 blaze.

PROVINCETOWN — Fire Chief Michael Trovato, who returned late Monday from vacation, said firefighters have no plans to walk out in protest of looting charges brought against them by police.

He commented last week in a telephone interview from Florida that department members were ready to quit because of what they considered unfair treatment by the police.

Trovato said yesterday that statement was accurate at the time, but since then the firefighters got help they needed to make it through a difficult two weeks.

"They did get a lot of help after that," he said. "The other chiefs from Up Cape were helpful and the town manager got on the bandwagon. He was very supportive of these guys and that's what they needed."

Trovato said he still has not met with members of the fire department to plan a defense or strategy on how to respond to charges that

"I need some time to meet with the guys," he said. "I want to talk to the (fire district) engineers and see what our next move will be, because this whole thing has really been blown out of proportion."

On his second day back from vacation, Trovato vowed to stick with his department until the looting charges are resolved.

"I don't know what I'm going to do after all this is over," he said.

Meanwhile, yesterday buttons that read, "I support our volunteer fire department" were distributed to eight stores around town. The \$1.50 cost of each will go toward the Firemen's Association.

"I was trying to think of a way for the public to show their support for the fire department," said Howie Schneider, a Provincetown cartoonist who made the buttons. "I wanted to help their morale. I can certainly understand how they feel really sandbagged by this."