

Library - Keynote Speech- June 16, 2012

When Library Trustee Mick Rudd asked me if I would give the keynote speech on this auspicious occasion, I promised him that it would not exceed Governor Everett's two-hour oration at Gettysburg or be as brief as Lincoln's fifteen-minute address. That leaves me with about one hour and 7 minutes at the most. I will not fret the audience at the outset with such a threat of prolonged discourse; however, I do have a lot to say about this beautiful and remarkable building being dedicated today as the Provincetown Public Library. Doubtless, you already know the salient facts about this building's history, but I would like to ask you to be a little patient as I walk you through a retrospect of what it was and what it has, by degrees, become, hand in hand with many of those of the past and present who have enabled us to arrive, through their belief, dedication and sacrifice, at the event we are celebrating today.

Please recall that the first Methodists in Provincetown were not exactly welcomed by the community in the early 19th century, especially by the Congregationalists, but their number vastly increased between 1795, when their first church was built, and 1860 when the Center Methodist Episcopal Church was constructed. At the time the church was reputed to be the largest church of Methodist denomination in America rising to a height of 162 feet. The spire itself was approximately 62 feet but was dismantled after the Portland Gale by local carpenter Irving Freeman because of its instability. The great church soon became a central magnet for a growing population of parishioners with its spacious second floor sanctuary and mezzanine balconies. Methodism was here to stay and the parsonage opposite the church on Center Street was occupied successively by dedicated ministers. Sal recalls the Rev. Dewey in the '40s mowing the sloping lawn and having to navigate around the huge Newfoundland dog belonging to Mr. Edel, the artist who lived next door and kept an art shop. Edel should be remembered for his devotion to his friend Oliver Chaffee several of whose large and magnificent canvases he saved from being carried to the dump, storing them for years until his daughter so generously gave them to the Heritage Museum after her father's death. Sal also recalls the Rev. Dewey chastising Harry Kemp for his frequent visitations to the local bar and Harry's reply: "But reverend, you well know that Jesus had to convert sinners by entering into their midst."

In the late 1950s after nearly 100 years, the costs of running the church

were becoming burdensome, however, and quite a number of the parishioners wanted to sell it to Walter Chrysler, Jr. who wished to convert it to an art museum to house his collection. Arctic explorer Rear Admiral Donald B. MacMillan begged his fellow parishioners to remember the pealing of its great bell calling them to worship, a bell which had been cast in 1837, just two years after the Liberty Bell cracked, and to rally around the preservation of the church as a church. His pleading was in vain, however, as was the strenuous effort of the artist Ross Moffett and the considerable persuasive power of Dr. Daniel Hiebert. It was sold in 1958 to Walter Chrysler and gradually converted to an art museum. In the conversion, very few of the external elements were altered, but many of the interior elements were destroyed, including the tracker organ as well as significant damage to the stenciled ceiling over the sanctuary to support a false floor to store the art collection. The colorful history of the art museum lasted but a few years, however, and then Chrysler's collection was moved to Norfolk, Virginia.

Now, the 100 year old edifice was in dire straits to find a savior to believe in its future; however the church had been well made and had survived both storms and neglect. In that chasm between its possible complete destruction in order to create a parking lot, its use as a tourist haberdashery or a movie theater, an organization known as the Center for the Arts, one of whose promoters was the jeweler and artisan Jules Brenner, emerged to take it over for civic use, especially in the area of the arts. Such usage, however, lacked financial viability, and, by 1974, the die appeared to be cast for its eventual degradation or destruction. It was at this point on a particularly gorgeous day that, as I looked up at the church, when driving past on Commercial street, a brilliant sunset flashed across the sky framing the belfry with a halo of light. I resolved then and there that this building must survive, and I never lost that conviction

My husband Salvatore willingly joined me in this belief as did many another concerned citizen in the town among whom was the ardent supporter of local history Cyril Patrick, Jr who was president of the Provincetown Historical Association, a local non-profit group devoted to preserving the town's historic legacy. Joining together, with the Historic District Study Committee, on which I was serving at the time, we prepared the paper work to nominate the building as a National Registered Landmark, and, in October 1975, it was placed on the National Register. The next step was to negotiate with the First National Bank of Provincetown to buy the building. We had been authorized to do so as a Committee for the Acquisition of the Old Center Methodist Church by the Selectmen who had added to our

three, the chairman of the Freeman Street Public Library Joseph Lema and fellow library trustee Adelaide Kenney who, incidentally, had been a member of the Center Methodist church all her life. See how the golden threads appear in the cloth- two library trustees added to help steer the museum that would, eventually, become this library. When we began negotiations with the bank, they hesitated to give us the mortgage figure, but conceded, when we pressed the issue, to selling the building to the town for \$135,000, the outstanding mortgage on the property. I presented the article to the special town meeting on November 12, 1975, to purchase the church and the article passed. It was then that the Provincetown Heritage Museum was established and the long trajectory leading to today's events began in earnest.

We five were blessed in the beginning with hope and faith which never altered. For instance, when we were laboriously removing three-inch screws with hand-held screw drivers from the movie theater seats which had been so steadfastly screwed to the floor of the sanctuary our intrepid Joe Lema made the call: "Well, he said, mopping the sweat from his brow, the impossible just takes a little longer." Initially, of course, we hired an engineer to tell us the strength and weaknesses of the building, and we found that her strengths exceeded her weaknesses by far, but we also discovered that the brick pilings supporting the church timbers had been significantly compromised by Chrysler's attempt to create art storage vaults, which eventually proved useless, in the rear of the basement. Quickly, therefore, George Bryant, David Colburn and Sal had to brace the temporary cement block walls holding back the sand with two-by-fours to prevent their collapse from unpredictable movement. I can still see Ralph Santos crawling around afterward in that difficult environment with not much head room, painstakingly repairing the brick pillars and realigning them properly to bear the weight of the timbers, and I am overwhelmed by the contrast of those conditions with today's bright basement with its archival and spacious working areas .

Initially, we had to ponder very carefully how we would present the historic legacy to the public in order to interest visitation. We went to New Bedford to see the model of the famous whaling schooner the "Lagoda" and to garner material for our dream of constructing a half-scale model of the famous fishing schooner "The Rose Dorothea" which had won the Boston to Gloucester fishermen's race in 1907 We decided that there was only one man that could handle such a concept, and that man was Captain Francis "Flyer" Santos Would he do it? He agreed, and, in 1977, the project began, "Flyer" sought the plans of the "L.C. Dutton", from the Mystic Seaport Museum, a schooner of the type of spoon-bow schooner designed

by Tom McManus, to which the "Rose Dorothea" also belonged, because there were no existing plans for the "Rose." He also made the trip to the Mystic Museum himself, and when he returned and was ready to proceed, he laid his plans out on the sanctuary floor and the eleven-year project began.

Before the real construction could commence, however, the entire false ceiling over the sanctuary had to be dismantled so that the masts of the "Rose" could rise to the proper height. This job was enormous and dangerous, but the gallant young Richard Meads accomplished the acrobatic feat of cutting down the timbers with cheerful aplomb. The lumber fell like rain with thunderous sound, so that, in the end, the whole scene resembled Dresden after the war. The space cleared, "Flyer" could proceed, and he did so, often using much of the seasoned wood that had been cut down to good advantage in the construction of the half-scale model.

By 1978, the hull was a reality, stem and stern in place. Many able hands assisted in the construction, some were volunteers and a few were paid small sums, but, for the most part, it was a labor of love. Ed Carlson, Richard Meads, Michael Crowe and David Ditacchio were early and consistent volunteers. Flyer's family: brother Jimmy Sants, sons Arthur Joe and Francis John Santos and, later in the process, my cousin Ian Tsukroff and the inimitable Frank James. Susan Avellar stayed with "Flyer" to assist him in the laborious process of shaping and sanding the bowsprit from laminated wood that "Flyer" had retrieved from ceiling lumber. Artist Ernie Irmer painted the the name of the "Rose" and the scroll work on the bow and Ray Merrill crafted the hatch cover with meticulous care from the hard pine library shelving which had been stored with us from the Freeman Street Library, as that building was under renovation at the time, having received National Landmark designation the year before the museum. Last, but not least, the students of the Marine Boat Building Department of the Cape Cod Technical Regional High School made the half-scale dories which sit so naturally on the deck of the "Rose." "Flyer" himself, of course, never received one penny during his eleven years of labor constructing the "Rose"

When the hull and decking were completed and painted, then the masts had to be hoisted in place which were made of hollow, plastic tubing, because the building would not carry the weight of solid, pine masts. The sails were then bent to the masts, sails which were, according to Captain Santos, probably the very last hand-sewn canvas sails made in America, which had been crafted by the sail-maker Ernest W. Smith of Fair Haven, Massachusetts. Rigging the schooner was in charge

of Frank James, master rigger and seaman who was such a close friend of "Flyer's". The rope work required 375 pounds of rope, and the process was extremely complicated. A photograph of Frank and "Flyer" can be seen, together with other photographs of the construction of the "Rose Dorothea", in the stairwell of the Library leading to the mezzanine. In the end, the "Rose Dorothea" cost \$75,000 to build, all of which was paid for by the Provincetown Historical Association whose treasurer Dorothy Curran, dubbed by the irrepressible Jan Kelly as "Dorothy Currency," took meticulous care of the funds. As extensive as you may feel all this is, it is but a breviary of the pertinent facts.

Throughout the first year of operation, we were continually working on exhibits we felt would interest the visitors to the museum featuring the Provincetown community and, especially, the Portuguese and fishing tradition. The exhibits had to be created with imagination from resources the town already possessed such as the beautiful Lipton Cup, our prize from the "Rose Dorothea's" victory in the 1907 Fishermen's Race, or the unusual artifacts of the Provincetown Fire Department such as Sandwich Glass trophies of the several stations, priceless leather buckets and the old Benjamin Franklin fire engine. The Freeman Street Library loaned us several pieces of period furniture, bookshelves and books to recreate the old library.

We created a Portuguese kitchen which boasted a Christmas representation of the minho Gesu, or Portuguese creche, in one corner, given to us by Grace Goveia. Dorothy Cook gave us artifacts from the Adams Pharmacy to make a replication of that worthy establishment. There was a Victorian living room dedicated to our most famous 19th century whaling captain, Captain Nathaniel Atwood with furniture provided by Truro artisan James Simpson. There was, also, in the living room, a functional hand-winding victrola on which I played, after hours, some wonderful old 78 records given to us by John Bell. The facsimile of Harry Kemp's dune shack was installed by Sunny Tasha and contained his old typewriter and a kerosene stove, actually Frenchie's. A view of the ocean was painted behind the shack's window by that versatile artist Harvey Dodd. Two very large marine aquaria to show the life teeming on the sand flats were given by my mother Osma Tod and her husband Jim. Marine objects came from everywhere and one of them was a perfectly intact ship's porthole donated by Maline Costa. George Bryant and Fred Hemley loaned us wonderful old photographic collections of the town, the latter collection originally taken by artist George Elmer Browne.

In the midst of all this activity, an artist arrived by the name of Mary

Bono whose special skill was creating life size wax portraits. In no time, she provided us with a sober, comely "librarian," a Portuguese mother rocking her child, and John Adams come back to life to commandeer the counter of the Adams Pharmacy. Her last achievement was the life cast of our own town fisherman Irving Roderick whom we proudly placed in the whaleboat "Pico" (borrowed from the New Bedford Museum) where he could engage the immediate interest of any visitor to the museum. Irving, however, mysteriously disappeared from the society of his associates in the wax figure department of museum artifacts when they were moved from the museum to storage in the Grace Goveia building after the museum closed in 1999. Irving's famous visage may have been captured by someone or even lost. If anyone, therefore, can tell our multidimensional Town Clerk Doug Johnstone where he is or produce his striking presence in cold wax, Doug, who is keeper of the other family of wax persons and of the entire Heritage Museum collection, would be delighted to receive him back-no questions asked.

Lastly, but of great importance, was our endeavor to provide significant representation of the art of the Provincetown colony and this task fell to Sal and myself as curators of the Heritage Museum. During the entire time of our very active participation as curators from 1975-1995, we collected and/or received approximately 200 works of art representing a wide spectrum of the community's rich heritage. These were added to the outstanding collection Provincetown already possessed. We mounted a large, representative exhibit on an annual basis in our gallery 60 feet long with a very good light, one of the most beneficial of the legacies left us by Walter Chrysler. Sometimes, the shows were general, but we often featured one-man retrospectives as in the case of deceased artists Oliver Chaffee Victor De Carlo and Ross Moffett. and a major retrospective for George Yater, while he was still alive, in 1991. Periodically, we featured special shows on specific subjects such as the Provincetown Hooked Rug Tradition or the Provincetown Color Woodblock School. The gallery did not represent the only art in the building, of course. For instance, the artist Steve Toomey undertook a daunting mural conception of the wharf environment, as it would have appeared as the "Rose Dorothea" lay at berth. These four feet by eight feet murals in oil represented a panorama of the early 1900s on the Provincetown waterfront which Steve had faithfully produced from old photographs and records, working in both cold and heat on the mezzanine of the museum for two years. They were dedicated in June, 1982.

This is just a portion of what displays were initiated to keep the museum earning income, and, annually, I appeared before the finance committee to plead

our cause For the most part, the Heritage Museum ran on love and faith and not much money. We started out in 1976 earning 50% of our operating budget, but by 1985, we earned 147% of our operating budget, and from then on, we were returning a surplus to the town until, by 1992, the negative balance on the entire operating budget from day one was only \$824 dollars. That meant that the cost to the town for the first sixteen years had been \$39 dollars a year. It would have been hard to characterize the building as a "white elephant," but some people still did. Of course, we had capital expenses, but in the 18 years from 1976 to 1994, that cost was a total of \$174,211. A further success story can be extrapolated from the purchase of the building which came under the Massachusetts Historical Commission grant-in-aid program, because we had been designated as an historic landmark. I wrote four grant-in-aid applications for money we received as a 50% cost of building grant. The amount of \$65,925 through this process totally eliminated the interest on the debt, so that the cost of the building was, in the end \$132,775. The final summary, then, of the total cost of the building to the town for the first 18 years of operation was \$18,093 per annum.

I have bothered to bore you with all this in order to point out what love and sacrifice and hard work and dedication can accomplish. Just as the trustees and those who serve so ardently this public library today are dealing with the routine responsibilities inherent in managing such a large structure, it may comfort you to know that it was done before you and will be after your term of hard work and determination, because you believe in the future. Of course, let us not forget the essential elements that made the financial viability a reality, and that was individual commitment. When the spiders invaded the sensors of the fire alarm system thus setting off the alarm, Bill Ingraham was there to check everything out, night or day, and I would receive a call promptly: "It's alright, Jo, just a spider in the works." Bill's loyalty to the museum was very important to us, not just as fire inspector, but as an imaginative participant in our endeavor. We also had constant support from the integrity of our custodial staff. Even though they were the only paid staff, they often went far beyond their prescribed duties and could be relied upon to go the extra mile when it counted.

Now, however, I must example the heart of the operation without the detail that is due, for, over the thirteen years in which I was attached to the Heritage Museum like a barnacle, these persons were so indispensable that they must be

cited like the stone workers who built the great Gothic cathedrals. They were the volunteers who manned the desk at the museum from June until October, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., in shifts of two hours each. To carry on that kind of operation, year after year, without much defection due to health, inclination or otherwise is close to producing a miracle. Among the loyal band of volunteers are far too many to mention. The list goes back to the beginning and, through 1993, numbered 150 volunteers. One among all these friends, I would like to comment upon as being emblematic of what the museum was all about. The elderly Catharine Cadose was an early and faithful volunteer as long as her life lasted, and she would arrive at her shift at the desk with her cousin Julia Silva in tow. She greeted visitors with a hearty welcome: "Welcome to the Heritage Museum," she would proclaim with more than usual decibel delivery. "If you have any questions, you will have to ask Julia, because I'm deaf as a haddock." This was great stuff, the "real thing" you might say, announcing to the world that this museum was Provincetown all the way, down to the volunteer desk.

When dedication day of the completed half-scale model of the "Rose Dorothea" arrived, the entire town turned out. The school children of grades four, five and six gave a reading, composed a ditty and danced a Portuguese dance; the high school chorus sang and Captain Santos and his wife Irene ascended the steps to the museum beneath a canopy of brooms held over them to indicate the "Rose Dorothea's" clean sweep in her victory in the Boston-Gloucester Fishermen's Race of 1907. All these memories come rushing back upon me now, and even so, I am unable to give you the sense of achievement on the part of all of those contributing to the effort to keep the Provincetown Heritage Museum running successfully.

The succession of loyal trustees who served through all the twenty years from 1975 to 1995, were critically essential to keeping the entire structural fabric of the endeavor together, giving of their time and energy throughout this extraordinary journey. They were, in addition to the five founding trustees, Nathan Malchman, Roslyn Garfield, Claude Jensen, Gail Vasques, Marilyn Colburn, Francis Santos, Elmer Silva, Ruth Bardsley, Dorothy Simmons, Chuck Turley and Bert Walker. In 1995, however, the lineage of the role of chairman of the trustees came to a faltering end due to the death of, first, Elmer Silva who served in 1991 and 1992 and then to the death of David Colburn who followed him in 1993 and 1994. It became necessary for the town to hire a director, at that point, in order to carry out a functional schedule. Dale Fanning was appointed to the position, and he ran the daily operation of the museum efficiently until it closed in 1999.

When the museum finally closed, my grief was long and deep. I saw twenty-five

years of endeavor gone and the possibility of the building we had raised from the dead with all the artifacts and collections doomed to dispersal and/or degradation. I was especially concerned for the "Rose" and her future which would not be destruction from a German submarine, which had destroyed the original vessel, but by the eroding factors of time and neglect. I needn't have worried, however, because "Flyer" took up the ancient tool of sheer, passionate persuasion and, in the discussion about the destiny of the "Rose Dorothea," during the transition from Heritage Museum to Provincetown Public Library, he wasted no words: "You'll move that boat over my dead body." Sure enough, the "Rose" is still here and so is "Flyer", thank God.

Now, we are completing the last of this walk through time, and most of you can tell the story better than I from this point on, but I would like to mention, for the record, how exceptional has been the second line of troops that rescued this great and beautiful edifice for another rebirth of service to the community: Chairman Marcia Fair, Librarian Deborah de Jonker Berry, trustees Maghi Geary, Jim Cole and Mick Rudd all of whom have been so outstanding in their astonishing commitment and their strength in holding on to rescue this church-museum-library for the town's great benefit. It would require another speech to iterate all that has been accomplished over the last decade due to the dedication of the library trustees, the staff, the Friends of the Library, the architect who executed such a marvelous and beautiful renovation of the building and many others who gave generously to this resurrection. It was a Transforming moment for me, therefore, when the belfry was returned to cap, as crown, the library with the great bell shining like a jewel in its center I could hear Rear Admiral MacMillan shouting from the roof in praise of the old church he had loved and the town that had nurtured him.

It is perhaps appropriate to realize that we are all actors in this life, or have been, or will be, and that someone is waiting in the wings to give their performance following ours. As I step aside and join the retiring cast of characters, it is my hope you will always remember them with respect, with pride and with rejoicing for their presence once upon this stage.

Josephine C. Del Deo
Provincetown Public Library
June 16, 2012