

The Churches Of Provincetown

The first church in Provincetown was a Meeting House built in 1717-18. This was the first place of worship in Town. It was built about 100 yards north westerly from Bradford St., and a few feet south westerly from a fence between the western portion of a meadow near what is now Shankpainter Road. (this is likely near where the Methodist Church is now standing). The level valley that was connected with Shankpainter Pond was called " Meeting House Plain". This was located near the old cemetery on Winthrop St.

The second Meeting House was a rebuilding of the first. It was erected by the inhabitants of the Town in 1773 , 56 yrs. after the first church. The pews in the church were sold to make money for the church.

The third Meeting House was called the " Old White Oak". It was voted , in 1792, "to build a meeting house and to set it near " North Meadow Gut". This was near a creek that used to run through the beach at the foot of Gosnold St. , up to the junction of Bradford. It flowed easterly and northerly , at the base of High Pole Hill and south as far as the rise of ground at the Center School House, (Alden St.) and beyond to the railroad station (near Standish St.). The Meeting House was sold in 40 shares, and the people could subscribe to build the house.

In In 1793 , it was voted to build the Meeting House on the lot that is now the Catholic Parsonage (Prince St.). The frame from the building was cut from white oak trees in the forests of Provincetown, and was called " White Oak Meeting House". A part of this frame was used in the Congregational Church that used to be right near the Town Hall.

This church was built in 1843. Rev. Jeremiah Cushing was the first preacher and was succeeded by Rev. Samuel Spear. Rev. Spear was a graduate of Harvard College in 1715. He began his Pastorate in 1719, until 1741, when many of his parishioners moved, he also left. He was succeeded by a few others, and in 1773, Rev. Samuel Parker came to Provincetown. He was installed in 1774. Methodism came into the Parish in the last part of his ministry. His Parish devided and many deserted to Methodism. In 1841, another Congregational Church was organized. In 1845, Rev. Osborn Myrick became the Pastor of the church. He resigned in 1866.

The fourth church erected was in 1795, " The Methodist Episcopal Society". It encountered much opppsition at first. It was a one story building, 30- 40 ft.

The fifth church was built by the Methodist Society in 1817. It was on the corner of Bradford St. and Ryder St. , (before Ryder St. was widened). This was a large bldg., with the first spire and church bell. this was on the site of what was the homestead of Dr. Henry Shortle.

In 1847 it was replaced by a church in front of High Pole

Hill, (at the base of Monument Hill, on Bradford St.) It was in the empty lots where the Bas Relief now stands. These lots were later occupied by Joshua T. Small's building, fronting Ryder St., and in the other lot, a skating rink. This was a large church and could seat 1200 people. It was occupied until 1860. when the Center Methodist Church was built on the corner of Center St. and Commercial St.

The second Methodist Church, known as Wesleyan Chapel, was originally owned by the Christian Union Society. It was probably at what is now 164 Commercial St. (The Captain And His Ship). It was purchased in 1848, by Freeman Atkins, Samuel Soper, & Rufus L. Thatcher. The church was remodeled after it's purchase, when 95 members withdrew from the Center Church. The Church membership, had so increased, that the members decided to build a new structure, In 1865 the bell was taken from the old chapel, and put in the new one. The church was dedicated in 1866, and was called The Centenary Church, under the pasorage of Rev. George W. Bridge. The members were determined to have a higher steeple than their Mother Church (The Center Methodist Church, now the " Heritage Museum"). They built the steeple 1 foot higher. The steeple was struck by lightning and burned down. A new chapel was built there, but after a while , membership fell off, and eventually they merged with their Mother Church again.

The first " Unitarian Society" was organized in 1829, in the Enos Nickerson School House. It changed it's name to the " First Christian Union Society". The first pastor, in 1830, was Asahel Davis, from Portsmouth, N. H. A church was built on the premise of Abner B. Rich. (possibly where a rooming house, called " Captain And His Ship" now stands) 164 Commercial St.) This property was later sold to the Methodist Society.

The second Universalist Church, now standing, was erected in 1847. This church is on Commercial St., in the center of Town.

The Catholic Society was organized by Rev. Joseph M. Finotti, in 1851. The first service was held in the house of Thomas Welch, on Franklin St., previously the Freeman House. The Sunday school was held early, by Jerimiah Quean, with 3 pupils, which later numbered over 500. In 1853, Mr. Finotti bought the bldg. on Bradford St., known as " Wesleyan Academy", which was subsequently occupied by the Town High School, for a place of worship. Public services were held there until the purchase , in 1872, of Adam's Hall, by Father O' Conner, for \$4,500. The Society worshipped here until 1875, when it was destroyed by fire. The present house of Worship, is St. Peter's Church on Prince St. (Still standing). It was concecrated Oct. 12, 1874, and a parsonage added in 1886. The following Priests were pastors; Father Joseph M. Finotti, 1851, Father O'Conner 1860, etc. It became a flourishing church with many Irish and Portugese members.

In 1919 , a few Episcopalians, purchased an old " salt house" on the waterfront. They removed the top story ,and the bottom became the Church. This church was called , St. Mary Of The Harbor They later added the old " Sand Bar Club" in the West end. It was taken apart and moved to the site to form the Chancel, and the original part of the house became the Nave.

Mr. Frederick Waugh, a famous painter, drew the plans and Rev. Robert Wood Nicholson was the first year round priest to serve. Many well known artists, painters, and sculptors gave their works in memory of their loved ones. The Church was dedicated in 1936. In the garden is the s-4 Cross, in memory of the men who lost their lives, when the s-4 sank off Race Point, Dec. 17, 1927. This Church is very active today. St. Mary Of The Harbor may be found on 517 Commercial St.

* Much of this information has been obtained from these books; " The Provincetown Book", Nancy Paine Smith, " Provincetown, or Odds And Ends From The Tip End", Herman A. Jennings, The Provincetown section of " History Of Barnstable County", by Deyo, and "Churches On Cape Cod", Marion Rawson Vuilleumier.

Some of these books can be found at this Library.

Bonnie Steele McGhee *April*
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