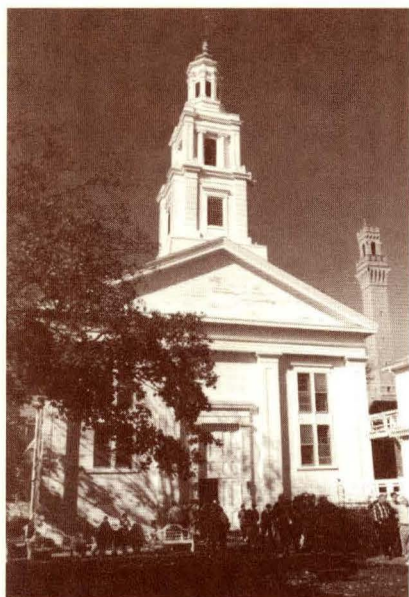


The Great Building Era of Provincetown



An Historical Symposium

Saturday, May 1, 1999

2 p.m. – 5 p.m.

The Universalist Meeting House
236 Commercial Street Provincetown, Massachusetts

Honorary Committee

Edward M. Kennedy <i>Senator</i>	W. Walter Boyd
John Kerry <i>Senator</i>	Douglas Brooks
Gerry E. Studds <i>Representative</i>	Bill Docker
Barney Frank <i>Representative</i>	Clive Driver
Henri Rauschenbach <i>State Senator</i>	Roslyn Garfield Phyllis Temple
Charles Tseckares <i>Boston Society of Architects</i>	Ruth Hiebert
Hatty Walker Fitts <i>Fine Arts Work Center</i>	Joy McNulty
	Gary Reinhardt
	Alix L. Ritchie Martha Davis
	Tom Rogers
	Pat Shultz Lenore Ross
	Mark Silva
	Berta Walker

Welcome to the Historical Symposium at the Meeting House,

Today we come together as a community, residents and friends of Provincetown, to celebrate the Meeting House.

Your day will be filled with the sights, sounds, and history of this magnificent building. You will share in the serenity of the sanctuary and some marvelous music from our historic Tracker pipe organ. You will learn more about this remarkable building and its place in the history of architecture.

The Meeting House nurtures and enriches us. We gather here for community celebrations, personal and community memorial services, weddings, celebrations of childhood, musical performances, thought provoking lectures, poetry readings and theater.

For many of us the elegant beauty of the Meeting House with its lofty, inspiring steeple serves as a grounding landmark. A visit to the building or time spent on the front lawn offers a peaceful respite from the hectic pace of life.

Today you will be asked to assist in the preservation of this irreplaceable landmark. Your generous participation in the treasuring and restoration of this magnificent building is essential. Please join us by recognizing the importance of the Meeting House to Provincetown and to the world.

Sincerely,



Jane J. Lea
President, The Meeting House Restoration Committee



The Great Building Era of Provincetown An Historical Symposium

- 2:00pm - 2:30pm Provincetown's Seaport Heyday:
Cultural History of Provincetown in the
Boom Years - 1840's and 50's
*Laurel Guadagno, Visitor Services
Manager, Pilgrim Monument &
Provincetown Museum*
- 2:30pm - 2:45pm 19th Century Organ Music
A selection of popular and religious
organ music of the 19th century.
*Dr. Gerry Weale, Director of Music
Education, Boston University*
- 2:45pm - 3:15pm The Greek Revival Style in
Provincetown
Greek Revival and how it emerged as
the predominant architectural style in
Provincetown.
*Tom Boland, Preservation Consultant,
Binder Boland & Associates*
- 3:15pm - 3:30pm 20th Century Organ Music
A selection of popular and religious
organ music of the 20th century.
*Dr. Gerry Weale, Director of Music
Education, Boston University*
- 3:30pm - 4:00pm Restoration of the Meeting House
Past repairs and the current restoration
of the Meeting House.
John Corbett, Landmark Rigging Inc.
- 4:00pm - 5:00pm Gala Reception

The following brief written discourse of the cultural history of Provincetown during the 19th century is a summary of the talk given by Laurel Guadagno at the historical symposium.

**Provincetown's Seaport Heyday:
Cultural History of Provincetown in the Boom Years -
1840's and 50's**

Provincetown's prosperity followed a neat curve, peaking in the 1850's when the town had the highest per capita income of any town in Massachusetts. In 1800 the census listed 812 inhabitants, by the end of the century the population had increased to more than 4000, almost equal to the current year-round population in town. The years of Provincetown's greatest prosperity and progress were between 1850 and 1875. Still the Boston Traveler said "No better place exists in which to spend a lazy, quiet vacation."

The location of the town of Provincetown has naturally determined the character of its business enterprises. From the beginning people here have depended upon the fisheries and other maritime activities as a source of income. During this time wealthy merchants and sea captains built Victorian, Gothic and Greek revival homes amid the Capes already built here. By mid-century Provincetown had a larger fleet of fishing and whaling ships than any other town on Cape Cod. More than fifty wharves lined the harbor along with windmills to pump sea water into vats where it would be evaporated and used in the curing of fish. Today all the windmills are gone and only three wharves jut into the harbor.

To understand the culture of Provincetown during the 19th century, we'll meet some characters from Provincetown's past, hear excerpts from diaries, and see an example of clothing from the holdings of the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum.

The following brief written discourse of how the Greek Revival style emerged as the predominant architectural style in Provincetown is a summary of the talk given by Tom Boland at the historical symposium.

The Greek Revival Style in Provincetown

After the war of 1812, Provincetown experienced the greatest period of growth in its history. Advances in ship building, whaling, and fishing made Provincetown an attractive location for mariners and fishermen to work and live. Provincetown's location - thrust out on the Atlantic Ocean on the spit of sand called Cape Cod - was instrumental in making it a viable port. In fact, by the end of the 19th century, Provincetown's per capita income was the highest in the state with nearly all revenues related to work on the sea.

Concurrent with Provincetown's rise in importance as a seafaring community, was the growing national interest in the Greek Revival architectural style. As its name implies, Greek Revival architecture was inspired by the design of ancient Greek, and sometimes Roman, temples. Symmetrical, monumental and massive in feeling, Greek Revival was a fitting architectural image for the new republic. It implied permanence and a sense of reverence for lofty democratic ideals.

The Greek Revival style is undoubtedly the most predominant architectural style in Provincetown. In fact, the surviving concentration of Greek Revival structures is nearly unparalleled for the region. It is reflected in the surviving public buildings of the era such as the Universalist Meeting House (1843) and the Eastern School (1844) as well as in numerous, more vernacular homes and commercial buildings built between 1830 and 1860.

The Universalist Meeting House is an excellent example of Greek Revival church architecture of the period and the only 19th century church on Commercial Street remaining in continuous use. The massive, wide corner pilasters topped with heavy capitals, the broad cornice band and monumental pedimented gable facing Commercial Street all recreate the Greek temple image but in a uniquely understated New England way. While the exterior is restrained in ornament, the interior of the Sanctuary comes alive with the classically inspired tromp l'oeil walls and ceiling.

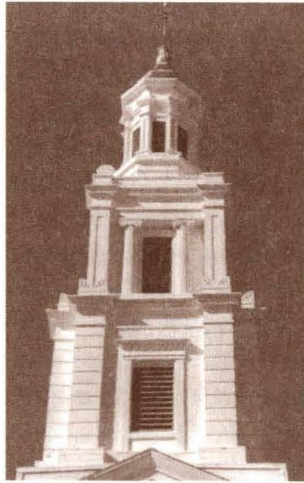
Through its first 150 years, the Universalist Meeting House has remained a focal point in the architecture of Provincetown and the heart of Provincetown's community.

A History of the Meeting House of Provincetown

Much of the following history of the Meeting House comes from the writings of church members and friends of the Meeting House who recognized the importance over the years of preserving the written history of this important building. The compilation of writings below, while edited, retains some of the flavor of the original writers.

The Early Years: 1818 - 1846

Our story begins on Long Point, the sandy tip of land that embraces Provincetown harbor. In the year 1818, approximately forty families moved from the town to Long Point. Soon this active fishing village contained over two hundred people and six windmills. The settlement lasted until the 1850's. Many of the families were named Freeman, descendants of Major John Freeman and Mercy Prence, daughter of Governor Prence. The name Prence Freeman became well-known on the Cape.



One day in 1820, Sylvia and Elizabeth Freeman were walking along the shore searching for driftwood. The young girls saw in the seaweed a small water-soaked, leather-covered book. Wading out, they brought it to shore. The Freemans were all avid readers and a book was a wonderful treasure. This one was *The Life of the Reverend John Murray: Preacher of Universal Salvation*. John Murray had been a chaplain in the Continental Army and was much revered as the organizer of the first Universalist church in America at Gloucester, Massachusetts. The two girls took the book home, dried it, read it and believed its message. Their mother and father, cousins and neighbors also read it and held many meetings and discussions. Soon an organization was formed, grew rapidly and became strong.

By 1829 the Universalists were gathering in a small meeting house opposite a thriving fishing wharf at Central and Commercial Streets. In 1846 this chapel, with its side galleries, was filled to overflowing and also needed major repairs. So on March 2, 1846, a committee was appointed to recommend either repairs to the old building or the building of a new larger church. On March 1, 1847, the membership voted to build a new church and to change their name to the First Universalist Society.

The New Meeting House: 1847 - 1899

On the evening of March 2, 1847, a committee was chosen to make all financial arrangements for a new meeting house. A week later John Gorham, David Smith, William Cook and Godfrey Ryder were appointed to seek in Boston and vicinity "the most modern style of church building." After diligent search, the most admired church was one at Fall River which had been built three years previously. The committee decided to draft a meeting house after the Fall River church, with suitable changes in design. The steeple of the new Provincetown building was undoubtedly inspired by details in books of the time by Asher Benjamin, the famous Boston architect, who was largely responsible for the Greek Revival period of architecture in the United States. The research, excellent taste, and good judgment of these men gave us the elegant beauty of the present Meeting House.

This committee was fortunate in finding at exactly the right time a young German artist, Carl Wendte, who had come to Boston only two years before. Hearing about his artistic work, they commissioned him to decorate the walls and ceiling of the new church. This he did in the trompe l'oeil manner which gives a three dimensional effect. His use of painted shadow to suggest depth was executed in a masterly way, depicting a lovely alcove in back of the pulpit and Greek columns along the walls. Overhead on the ceiling, Wendte copied the marble dome of the Temple of Jupiter in Athens. After the artist completed his work in Provincetown, he began painting a mural in a church in Boston. The church was unheated, he developed pneumonia and died, leaving his widow and three year old son. They subsequently moved to California. Years later the son returned.

In 1920 the Universalist Church of Provincetown had a special commemorative service to celebrate the 300th anniversary of the landing of the Pilgrims. The guest speaker on that occasion was Dr. Charles Wendte, son of Carl Wendte and a well-known Unitarian minister in California. He told his audience that his mother had impressed upon him the beauty of his father's work in this church, and how he had always longed to see it.

The furnishings of the interior of the building were chosen by the members in 1847. They chose Honduran mahogany for the pulpit and native pine, painted white, for the pews. The tops and rails of the pews are of mahogany and the white inserted medallions of polished ivory. Cushions used on the pews were of maroon velvet. The chandeliers are very rare and beautiful. They were made and installed by workmen from the Sandwich Glass Company. Globes, fonts and prisms are of original

Sandwich glass and in the old days burned whale oil, giving a soft glow to the entire church. The clock in the back of the sanctuary was given by Captain Joseph Atkins, a whaling captain and one of the original forty-seven organizers of the church. The sofa in the hall at the rear of the sanctuary came from the first chapel on Central Street. The organ, costing at that time about five hundred dollars, is still beautiful in sound and appearance. It is considered by experts to be one of the few original Tracker organs still in use in this country. The seating capacity of the sanctuary is 408. In the 1860's so many worshippers attended the services that the building of side galleries was considered. Fortunately this idea was defeated.

The dedication of the new church in December, 1847 was a grand occasion attended by hundreds of people, not only from Provincetown but also from other Massachusetts communities. The joy and pride of the members in this uniquely beautiful church was expressed in three successive services, with sermons, choir singing, a banquet and conferences that night and the next day. However, much work remained and the building was not completed until the 1860's. Prominent benefactors of the church at that time were William Nickerson, Godfrey Ryder, Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Grozier and Rev. William H. Ryder, whose Ryder Fund is still administered by the church for the benefit of the "deserving poor" of Provincetown.

Years of Struggle: Early 1900's

By 1900 Provincetown was no longer the busy, prosperous fishing town of the middle nineteenth century. The town's churches reflected the declining prosperity. During the next decades the membership of the Universalist parish struggled to finance needed repairs and to add modern, practical improvements. The vestry was completed, a chimney built, the furnace repaired, a new bell purchased and a plank sidewalk extended to Commercial Street. Also in 1902 the steeple had to be extensively repaired and strengthened at a cost of \$1,130. In 1909 Mr. Ramsey of New York gave money to install electricity in the vestry. In 1913 major repairs were again needed. With fewer members, this became more and more difficult. Consequently during many of the years of the next two decades, the church remained closed in the winter.

It was in 1921 that the Memorial Fund was first mentioned. As always the congregation contributed generously and marble tablets, commemorating the finding of the book at Long Point, were placed in the upper hallway. In addition to the names of Elizabeth and Sylvia Freeman, names

of former members were engraved on the tablets. This is a continuing memorial today. The Memorial Fund proved to be a valuable asset when the opportunity came to buy the house directly in front of the Church. One-half of the money collected was voted for this purpose and the house was removed, thus giving a less obstructed and more attractive view of the church building. During the following years, the land was filled, graded and seeded, and three trees planted. The iron fence along Commercial



Street was installed in 1925. Through a gift of Mr. William Nickerson in 1928, a full-time minister was secured and services held all year long. On a Sunday in 1929, many friends of the church joined with members to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the

Universalist Church in Provincetown. All enjoyed a service of rededication to the ideals of John Murray. In the 1930's and 1940's the topic in any meeting of the membership was finances. Many difficulties, including diminishing attendance, made obtaining necessary funds almost impossible. Finally in 1942, church services were again discontinued in the winter. Regular, full-time services were not resumed until the 1950's. In May, 1960 the Universalist united with the Unitarians to form the Unitarian-Universalist Association of which this church is a member.

The Restoration Committee: 1968

In 1968 the Restoration Committee of the Lower Cape was organized under the inspired and capable leadership of two church members, Joseph Acker and Jeff Bosworth. This Association, whose membership included interested people from all over the Lower Cape towns, undertook the restoration of the Universalist Church of Provincetown as its first important project. Though the primary task was to restore the unique interior trompe l'oeil walls damaged by a storm in 1957, other crucial repairs had to take precedence. Several years earlier the steeple was found to be leaning and in precarious condition. The roof was also leaking. Funds imme-

diately available were spent on repairing these essential structures. To raise money, the Committee held art shows and auctions, outdoor sales and suppers, and a yearly journal with advertisements from community businesses was published and donations solicited.

Meeting House Designated a National Historic Site - 1972

In 1972, the Provincetown Meeting House was admitted to the National Register of Historic Places and designated a National Historic Site. A well attended ceremony was held, in which Mr. F. X. Davoren, Secretary of State for Massachusetts, presented the official documents to Church trustees. In addition to the great honor of being included in the National Register of Historic Places, the designation helped in two ways: the Meeting House and its property would be protected against detrimental changes and the government could give matching funds for approved restoration projects. Another organization that actively supported the restoration work of the Meeting House was the women's group, the Get-Together Club, which in earlier times was known as the Ladies' Benevolent Society. Each year the women worked throughout the summer in a very busy thrift shop with much of the money raised going to the maintenance and beautification of the Meeting House lawn and to provide financial assistance in meeting the winter budget of the Meeting House.

The Restoration Committee: 1997

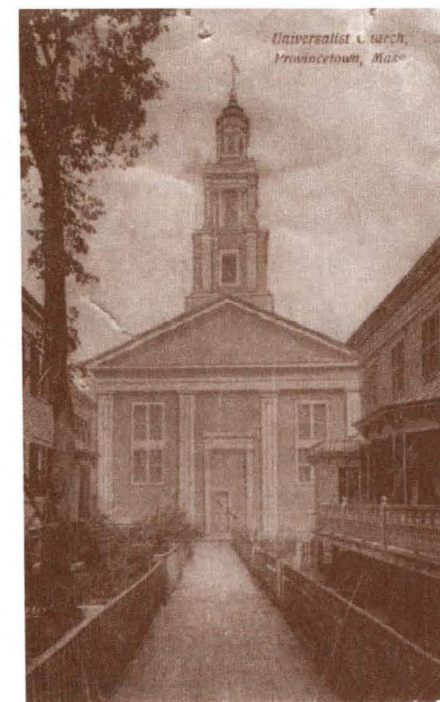
In the summer of 1997 the Meeting House Restoration Committee was re-established by the church Board of Directors President Douglas Brooks to oversee the continuing restoration of the Meeting House. The present members of this committee are Jane Lea, President, Tom Boland, David Davis, Eric Dray, Bill Dougal, Roberta M. Lasley, Candi McDonald, and Gary Reinhardt. The official name of this not-for-profit committee became the Meeting House Restoration Committee, Inc. The committee contacted the Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) in search of a matching \$100,000 grant and developed a 3 Phase Plan for the restoration of the Meeting House. Phase I was to stabilize the foundation and the steeple and correct roof and foundation drainage problems. In October of 1997 a group of members and friends of the church organized a Meeting House Capital Campaign (MHCC) drive to raise from church members and friends the initial \$100,000 for the restoration work and to secure the \$100,000 MHC matching grant. The MHCC drive canvassers were Co-chairs Roberta Lasley and John Drews and canvassers Gillian Drake, Keith Labasbas, Jack Lawton, Candi McDonald, Jan Ranken,

Alice Reis, and Ed Terrill. By January, 1998 The Meeting House Capital Campaign succeeded in raising from church members and friends over \$100,000 and was successful in obtaining the matching \$100,000 from the Massachusetts Historical Commission.

Phase I of the Restoration Begins: 1998

In May, 1998 the work on Phase I of the restoration of the Meeting House began. During the summer of 1998 new roof gutters were installed at the Meeting House, something the building did not have for many years. The original gutters had been roofed over during previous work that was done on the roof. The new gutters will keep any water run-off from rain or snow on the roof from doing any further damage to the exterior and interior of the building. Some of the cracks one sees on the trompe l'oeil interior walls of the auditorium are a result of water damage caused by the previous lack of gutters. For the first time in the long history of the Meeting House, the new gutters are vented

to add additional protection to the area under the roof. This will provide for better ventilation. The Meeting House also has new brass gutter down spouts protecting the building and the foundation from further water damage. When the workers removed the original, covered-over gutters during early Phase I restoration work, they discovered that the old gutters, now mostly rotted, which ran along-side the large building were each made from one tree indigenous to the Cape. The old gutters, around 10 inches in diameter, showed small burrs where the branches of the tree were cut off and hewed out by hand on one side to serve as the place on the trunk that the water collected. The crew replacing the gutters noted how heavy these one-piece gutters must have been at the time, many years ago, when they were originally placed on the building.



Meeting House Restoration Committee, Inc.

A not-for-profit organization

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Candi McDonald *Vice President*

Eric Dray *Treasurer*

Roberta M. Lasley *Fundraising Chair*

Tom Boland *Clerk*

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The Marble Tablets

A Tradition Continues

With the names of Godfrey Ryder, Nathan Freeman and Eben S. Smith engraved in the large marble tablets in the Meeting House foyer in the 1870's, an honored tradition recognizing the generosity of "Loving Friends" of the Meeting House began. Over the years, nearly 120 individuals and families joined the generous supporters of the Meeting House in this tradition – sharing in a timeless "Who's Who" in Provincetown's rich history.

It has been more than 25 years since a name has been added to any of the six marble tablets spanning the entrance wall to the sanctuary. Today, the *Meeting House Restoration Committee* revives this tradition.

Space remains for approximately 25 names on the existing tablets, with room on existing walls to expand the marble as necessary over time. Careful research of Meeting House records identify a shared legacy of generous support to The Meeting House among these names. Today, as you consider giving to the future of our Meeting House, consider a donation of \$5000 or more to confirm your place in this inspiring legacy.

To learn more about having your name or a name of your choosing etched in history on one of the marble tablets, please speak with a member of the Meeting House Restoration Committee or one of the event organizers.

**Your Generous Donation
Will Insure
The Preservation and Restoration
of the
Meeting House of Provincetown
for
Our Time and for Future Generations**

Levels of Support

**Donate \$5,000 or more
and have your name,
or a name of your choosing,
engraved on one of the
marble tablets.**

Benefactor	\$2,500 – \$4,999
Patron	\$1,000 – \$2,499
Contributor	\$100 – \$999

Those who contribute \$2,500 or more will be recognized with a brass nameplate on a wood plaque in the upstairs foyer of the Meeting House. For those who are able to contribute \$1,000 or more, their names will be added to a plaque in Acker Bosworth Hall. All who give \$100 or more will have their names added to *The Donor Book for The Restoration of 1999*.

Your donation is tax deductible. Please make your check out to The Meeting House Restoration Committee, Inc. Please also consider donations in stocks or securities.

The following were generous in donating financial and in-kind support for this Historical Symposium and Program Book.

1807 HOUSE
ADAM'S PHARMACY
AQUARIUM PARK MALL
ATLANTIC BAY REAL ESTATE, INC.
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GEORGE'S PIZZA
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*The following were generous in donating financial and in-kind support
for this Historical Symposium and Program Book.*

HOLIDAY INN

IN TOWN RESERVATIONS

LAND'S END MARINE SUPPLY, INC.

THE LITTLE STORE

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