

Research Club Offers To Help Church Many Deplore Decision To Sell Edifice

March 20, 1958

The first concrete offer of funds for help in the repair of the Center Methodist Church, if it is to remain the church, has been received from the directors of the Research Club of Provincetown who have voted to donate their remaining funds for the repair of the structure.

An anonymous donor has likewise agreed to give a similar sum under the same conditions. In all this would amount to approximately \$1,000.

Meantime letters from readers, deploring the abandonment of the colonial type edifice continue to come to The Advocate following the announcement that a decision has been reached to sell the structure to a New York City institution for conversion into an art museum. It is understood that the present intention is to abandon the present property with its commanding site at the corner of Commercial and Center Streets and to build a new church in the vicinity of Shank Painter Road and Brown Street.

Following are some of the letters received by The Advocate.

Editor, The Advocate:

When the first rumblings of the proposed sale of the Provincetown Methodist Church building came to my notice it disturbed me much. The more that I hear or read about it the more shocked I get.

To me it is nothing less than monstrous to sell that lovely landmark for strangers to use for what we know not. An art gallery? But what kind of an art gallery? Real art? Phony art? More than that, to build a church somewhere in the backlands, and to saddle a huge debt on the members of the church is a crying shame.

I am not a member of the Methodist Church. I did speak in its upstairs auditorium in 1902, on my first visit to Provincetown. When that upper story was rehabilitated some dozen or more years ago I spoke there again one Sunday morning. Several times while Mr. Dewey was on vacation, and at sundry other times I have spoken from the downstairs pulpit. I have always felt at home there. I like the people who meet there. My word at the moment is one of PROTEST, of diametric opposition to what is proposed.

It would be of great interest to all concerned were somebody to

reply to this letter and to others of like slant. Are there any valid arguments for the impending move?

Let's hear them. Let the light in. This is a strong statement: but evil deeds love darkness.

Henri Rouillard

Editor, The Advocate:

The proposed sale of the Methodist Church has come as a great shock to the people of this town. It affects us all, whatever our church affiliations may be.

As an Episcopalian, I cannot help feeling that if such a thing could happen in this case, it could also happen some day to our own beloved church on the harbor.

In this Pilgrim town, more than in any other of its size in New England, one would expect to see the familiar and characteristic white steeple as a necessary and focal point. As it is, the splendid site now occupied by the Methodist Church gives it a crucial and symbolic importance in our low sky-line, and this has been recognized by painters from all parts of the country who have visited Provincetown and painted it year after year.

Now that property on Commercial Street in the center of town is becoming more and more prohibitive in price and land more difficult to obtain, one would think that the ownership of such a magnificent site would be one of the proudest possessions of a church.

It seems to denote an extraordinary lack of feeling and to be against the whole character of Provincetown with its unique historical background to allow its largest and most conspicuous church building to be sold for other purposes and thus to become a meaningless piece of stage scenery upon the waterfront.

Mary Cecil Allen

Editor, The Advocate:

Have read the excellent letters of Mary Bicknell and "Profoundly Concerned Resident" in last week's Advocate—also that of Ross Moffett in The Advocate of March 6.

I thoroughly agree with all of these for it would be a lamentable piece of work to sell Center (Methodist) Church.

How many are acquainted with these historic Boston churches—

Old North Church, King's Chapel and Park Street Church of which my great grandfather, Ebenezer Nickerson, was one of the first pew holders? Are they thinking of disposing of any of these churches for paltry thousands and building modern structures in remote locations? No, indeed, people are still worshipping there and enjoy doing so.

Why can't people still worship in Center (Methodist) Church, the second oldest church in Provincetown, restoring it to meet modern needs and prevent it sharing the same fate of the oldest church—the Church of the Pilgrims?

Sincerely,

Nina S. Williams

Editor, The Advocate:

As a regular Summer guest to your town may I voice an opinion on the question of the sale concerning the majestic Methodist church on Commercial Street.

Christ with rightful indignation drove the monnie lenders from the Temple. Will the monnie lenders drive the worshippers from their Temple? Churches are built on consecrated ground for

religious cult only. Will material or even unhealthy recreation not desecrate the same ground?

Marie A. Kopp
Allentown, Pa.

Editor, The Advocate:

Does anyone really believe that New York purchasers are going to pay \$40,000 for the Center Methodist Church to be used for an art museum? How gullible can people be?

After many years the Methodist Church would be relegated way off.

Why couldn't they use either the Universalist or Congregational church buildings already erected rather than build another edifice?

Well Wisher

Editor, The Advocate:

Does a church's moral responsibility end after the Sunday sermon? I don't think so. I think that even the church edifices in a community symbolize a people's recognition of, and respect for, living spiritual values. Be he of Catholic, Hebrew, or Protestant faith, be he fisherman, business man or artist, summer or year-round resident, it is vitally important to everyone in this town that another church is not abandoned to just anyone with the

price.

Better that it be torn down. But, if it has to be sold because of financial difficulties, we, the

citizens of this community, should pitch in to preserve it in its original dignity as a church edifice and not permit it to become a sad reminder of our indifference and neglect.

Sincerely yours,
Philip C. Malicoat

Editor, The Advocate:

If an outsider may comment. Another outstanding example of New England church architecture is to go by the boards in the interest of so-called progress. To what? To the highest bidder. Another art (?) gallery.

This is, I suppose, to be preferred to the fate of a church in Boston known now as the Old Howard (burlesque theatre to the uninformed). Or closer to home, the Church of the Pilgrims, which now sports a hot dog stand in its shadow. It would have been kinder to put them to the torch.

If the church people in question lack pride in their most beautiful possession, it is obvious to me, the townspeople do not.

Jean Stevenson

P.S. And in what eon of time will the money-changers be driven again from the Temple?

"Hold It Sacred" Urges Famous Son

Following is a letter from Rear Admiral Donald B. MacMillan, U.S.N.R., regarding the plan of abandoning the present edifice of the Provincetown Methodist Church.

Editor, The Advocate:

I understand from heresay that a certain number of the members of the Methodist Church have voted to sell it for an Art Gallery. This is so hard to believe that I earnestly hope the report is unfounded.

To all who were fortunate enough to be born in Provincetown as I was, to have this place as a home as I do, the two churches—the Universalist and the Methodist—stand as the most interesting and most historical buildings in our town. We have our rolling dunes, moulded through the years into exquisite shapes, a beautifully-colored buff against the blue, shifting ever shifting through the years, an attraction which excites the interest of all who drive into town. We have our beautiful harbor, glittering in the sunlight, with its sturdy fleet of fishing boats, and our courageous Portuguese fishermen of whom we are proud, but nothing of such historic value as our two churches. Thousands of visitors driving into town through our narrow main street stop and enter and stand with reverence before the pulpits, and well they might, for here our fathers and mothers worshipped.

Can we forget the calling of the bells on Sunday morning? The stately procession of well-dressed men, women, and children along our four-planked sidewalk to the place of worship? The quiet entrance, the hush throughout the auditorium? The volume of music from the organ, the singing of canary birds in their cages hanging from the balcony on Easter morning? The old church stands tingling and vibrating with memories of days gone by. And do I understand that all is to be forgotten and that all is to be classed as sentiment? It is far more than that, for sentiment is one of the most powerful factors in the development of the human race, as our churches have been for more than 300 years in the betterment of the people of Provincetown.

Let us keep our church; let us hold it sacred for that for which our fathers and mothers built it—a place of worship. And if we do this, we cannot be false to those who have gone before, who were what they were because of that building; who walk with us through the day, who are still watching. Let the old Methodist Church be our yesterday and our tomorrows. When old age comes, when the elements such as fire, the sun and the rain and winds destroy, as all are destroyed, let it be God's will, not ours. Then and then only should we give up our church.

Sincerely,

Donald MacMillan