

Macara's Wharf Blaze

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He explained at present there was not enough time to make proper inspections of buildings which could be potential hazards.

Chairman of the Provincetown Board of Selectmen Carl Cummings agreed with Perry and said this week he felt there was the need of making the Fire Chief a permanent job.

Perry said he had asked Macara to do something about the wharf building two years ago. He said Macara had made some efforts to protect the property by boarding it up and posting it.

The Fire

Saturday's blaze was reported by Joseph Days and minutes after the call the area of Commercial Street between Standish Street and Johnson was blocked off to traffic while fire hose was extended from the street out to the burning wharf building.

Cold December winds aided by a Coast Guard helicopter fanned the flames of the fire which quickly spread throughout the building.

One fire fighter reported there was danger throughout the fire that the wharf would give way. Large holes between the wooden wharf planks made movement difficult. Bits of hot ash flew in all directions and one fireman said it was like feeling thousands of tiny bug bites on his hands.

During the blaze a helicopter reported to have been on a Coast Guard patrol flew over the blaze causing the flames to flare.

Perry, who was out of town on the day of the fire, said he was investigating the matter of the helicopter. "It was done in very bad taste," Perry said.

More helpful was a Coast Guard patrol boat from the Race Point Station which came along the east side of the wharf and assisted the firemen with its equipment.

In charge of the fire in Perry's absence was Deputy Chief Joseph Trovato and District Chief James Meads.

By noon a crowd of spectators had gathered at the end of the wharf and along the bay beach. Marsha Woolf, owner of the New World Deli, dispensed coffee to the fire

fighters.

Wharf's History

Following the fire, Macara said he plans to keep the wharf intact. The wharf, bought by Macara in 1943, is one of the last historic wharves left along the harbor.

It was built by Stephan Hilliard in 1866. In those days it was as difficult to get a permit to build a wharf as it is to get one to build a marina in 1973.

Thomas Lothrop, who built the first wharf in Provincetown, thought of the idea as a better way to handle fish. Vessels carrying fish into the harbor had to land their cargo by transferring it into small boats. The fish was then brought ashore in baskets called "sedans" carried by two men.

The idea of a wharf in the 1800's was viewed with suspicion and met with opposition and criticism from the town. Many felt the structure would not be able to handle the severe winds.

Lothrop built his wharf in the vicinity of Masonic Hall in 1846. It was a big success and between the years 1838 and 1848, Town

records show 21 permits granted for wharves in Provincetown.

Hilliard's wharf, later known as the Freeman and Hilliard Wharf, is pictured in early photographs as covered with frames on which split cod fish were spread to dry.

During the 1940's, Hilliard's Wharf was owned by the Higgins Lumber Company. When Macara purchased it, the wharf was being used by sailmaker James McGuire, who shared it with a chandler's shop.

Building Permits

No. 975. James H. Simpson, 199 Commercial St., Addition, \$1,000.

977. Capt. Bertil Von Gerber, Miller Hill Rd., New Residence, 27,650.

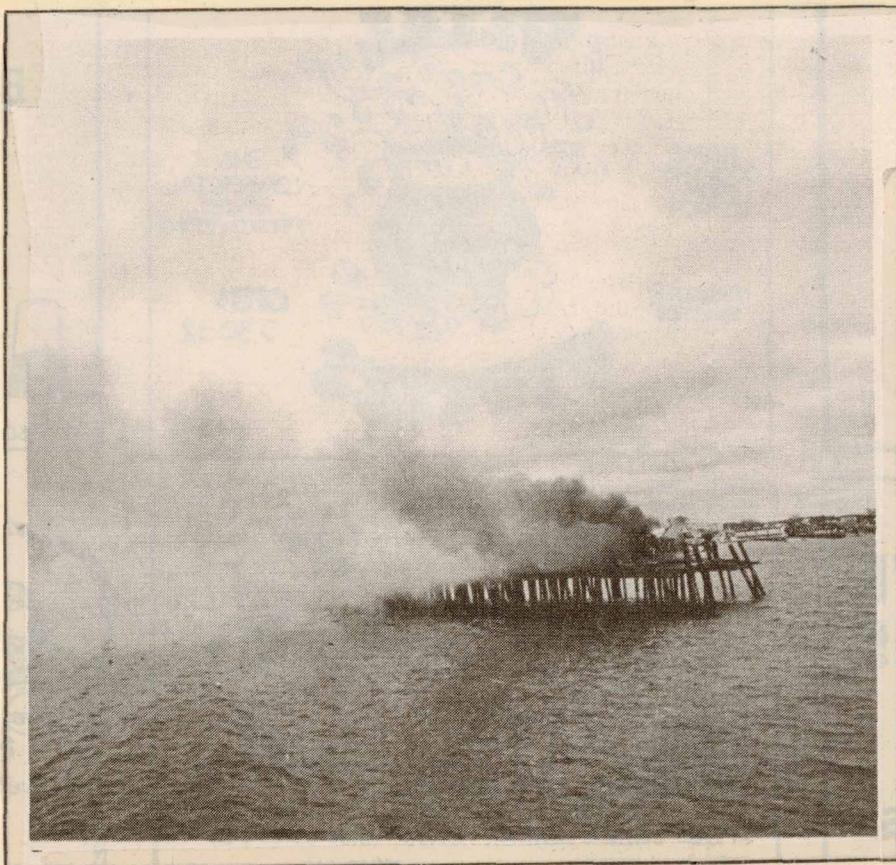
976. Patricia Shultz, 406 Commercial St., Addition, 10,000.

978. Raymond L. Myrer, 75 Commercial St., Picture windows & addition, 1,500.

TOTAL: \$40,150.00

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Hilliards Wharf (Now Macara's) with an artist - 1935