

History of Township Goes Back to Days of Norse Visits; Tradition Has Sea King Buried There

Beginning August 4 and continuing for four days, Provincetown will celebrate its 200th anniversary as a separate township. For the first time in its long history the little fishing town is to have a celebration that is all its own and not a part of some other anniversary.

For Provincetown is much more than two centuries old. History recounts that the Pilgrims first landed on what is now within the town limits in 1620, remaining for over a month before they decided to seek a more fertile soil on the mainland. But Provincetown's history goes back even beyond that date.

It is known that Thorvald, brother of Leif Erickson, ran ashore at what is now known as Long Point and was compelled to beach his ship for repairs. He found a goodly land and later, when near Boston an Indian arrow mortally wounded him, he directed that his body be buried in that goodly land. Now it is known as Chip Hill and tradition refers to it as the Norseman's Fort. This, it is recorded, was some time between 1020 and 1030, and would make the present celebration the 900th anniversary.

More recently it has been determined that the first human habitation was built in 1626-'27 and by 1650 was a recognized part of the Plymouth Plantation. Next it was learned it was made a part of Eastham Constabrick. But even in 1650, though many people called it their home, it was without definite position. In that year the governor of the colony bought the land known as Cape Cod, that is, from Long Point to Eastern Harbor and now the boundaries of the town, from one Samson, an Indian. It was purchased "for the said colony's use." It became known as the Province Land.

In 1714 it was made a precinct of Truro. The seat of local government at Truro Center was too far away to suit the fishermen and in 1715 they prayed the General Court that "Cape Cod (Province lands) be declared a part of Truro or not a part of Truro, that the town may know how to act in regard to some persons. The persons and what their vices were remains unknown.

Incorporated in 1727

In 1627 the town was incorporated, though in the act the state reaffirmed its ownership of the lands. This ownership, to a certain degree, the state still holds. Until as recent as 1893 it was possible to give only quit-claim deeds to land transfers.

In the application for local autonomy the name was Herrington, probably suggested by Herring Cove which still exists, but the state ordained that it

should be Provincetown and it was so written in.

For many years there was but one street, along the shore for some three and one-half miles. Within the memory of some living inhabitants the back road was widened and paved and named Bradford Street. When Commercial Street was laid out some idealist wanted it to be sixty-four feet wide but in the face of strong opposition he reduced his demand to half that amount. Even that width was too great and it was made twenty-two feet and to-day it remains the same narrow road. The side streets giving from Commercial Street to the Harbor are old town landings and those giving towards the north are old boatways.

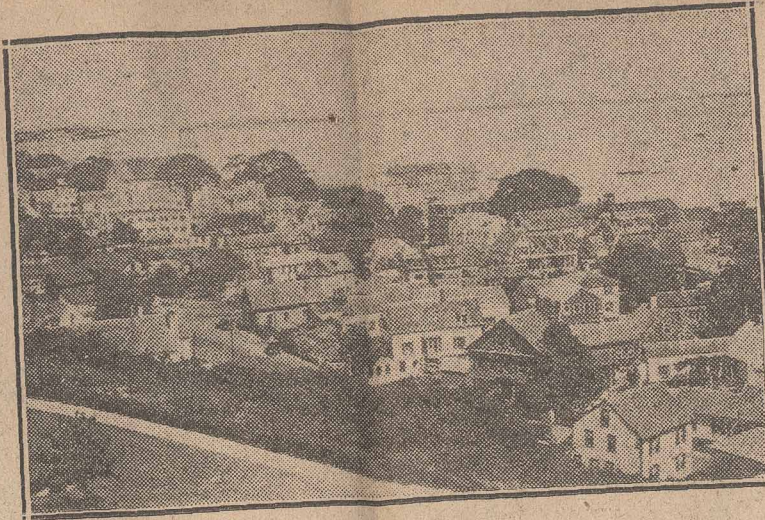
Through the traditional New England town government the town has been kept quaint. The main street has never been widened, solely because the people have been unwilling to go to the expense, and the narrow streets have been preserved. The little shingled cottages, seemingly huddled in each other's backyard, defy all rules of orderly alignment, and the stranger seeking the house of a friend or a washwoman has his work cut out for him. Though each corner bears a street name no one uses them. Certain streets are known by the name of their most prominent resident, for instance, "the street Will Young lives on" and "that street that begins at Miss Lizzie's." The two main arteries are simply known as the front street and the back street. The town is spoken of as being on the "inside" and the ocean and province lands behind the town are the "outside." A person goes "upalong" or "downalong," and never buys or purchases at a store—he trades there.

Contributions to Navy

Few Provincetown names appear in the muster rolls of the American army. In each war the town has contributed sailors to its fullest capacity. Due to its great geographical prominence, it is always in fear of invasion, providing, as it would in such case, a landing place that is without protection.

It is not generally known that Provincetown is the birthplace of the whaling industry in this country. The Pilgrims early learned that whales and blackfish cast up "by God's providence" upon the shores of Cape Cod were of great value. Tryworks were built on the beach, and as the tide ebbed and left the leviathan stranded on the flats the doughty Pilgrims hastened to dispatch him where he lay. The carcass was then cut up and carried to the nearest tryworks and rendered into oil.

Then came one who was impious and impatient of God's providence, who saw that a greater number of whales might be brought to his tryworks were he to go out in a small boat after them. This was the first attempt at off-shore whaling. Later, seeing the profit that accrued to the pioneer, they mounted



Provincetown as it looks from the Pilgrim Monument

their tryworks on larger ships, filled the hold with empty hogsheads and went off to deep water.

In 1672 Nantucket sent to Cape Cod (which in those days referred to the land between Long Point and Eastern Harbor) and offered James Lopar, Provincetown's best whaler, wood and water for his use, pasturage for one horse, three cows and twenty sheep on the common and ten acres of land, to remove to Nantucket and there carry on and teach whaling. Lopar, it is known, entered the agreement, but never left Cape Cod. The Nantucketers, still considering the knowledge and experience of Provincetown whalers as superior to their own, persisted in the plan, and eighteen years later persuaded Ichabod Paddock to come to the island and give them lessons in killing whales and trying out oil. The last whaler, the John R. Manta, left Provincetown in 1905, and the industry

closed down. Only last year Captain Stull, long known as 'the ambergris king,' was laid to rest.

Discovered by Artist

During the '90s this sleepy little town again was discovered. An artist, with a commission to paint a picture of the Sahara Desert compromised on the sand dunes. He told other artists of the natural beauty of the place, the sunsets that rivaled those of Italy, of the vari-colored lights in the bay at sunrise. Twenty-eight years ago Charles Hawthorne, N. A., founded the Cape Cod School of Art. Art students came from all over the country and carried memories of the little town back with them. Many returned to carry on their studies, some to make it a summer home and not a few to make it a permanent one. Then came writers and dramatists, poets, singers, in fact every type of creative artist.

During August Provincetown has the richest population in point of creative effort of any place in the world. Among them are Charles Hawthorne, Richard Miller, George Elmer Brown, W. Auerbach Levy and numerous other artists. Here live Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, Mary Heaton Vorse, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Harry Kemp and other writers of national fame. Sinclair Lewis, Floyd Dell, Edna St. Vincent Millay and many others have found that inspiration and solitude so necessary to creative effort. The town is rich in its artistic and literary associations.

In 1914, George Cram Cook brought both the artists and writers together in a common effort to found a real American theater. The contribution of the Provincetown Players to American drama is beyond all reckoning. Even to-day in a little town of some 3,500 people there are two theaters devoted to the spoken drama, and only one motion picture house.

To-day Provincetown is the mecca of all America's creative artists. The people are always ready to welcome them, and those chief necessities of the struggling artist, solitude, a sympathetic environment and the opportunity to live economically and moderately, are ever present. Provincetown, for some unfathomable reason, refuses to become modern and expensive.

Some time ago a writer who decided to make Provincetown his permanent home had his goods removed from his temporary home to a purchased one. The change involved moving a household something over two miles. The furniture and trunks were loaded on a truck and three trips were made. When the moving was accomplished the householder said:

"Well, Fred, how much do I owe you?"

Locality, Long Associated With Artists and Writers, Has Made Important Contributions to the Theater

"Three trips, Frank, will be \$1.50; 50 cents a trip."

The amazed writer thought of the \$20 it had cost to have the same furniture moved less than a mile in New York.

A goal for poor artists? A goal for any one!