

The Advocate, Thursday, June 1, 1978

# Norman Cook dies in England

By Steven Schwadron

Norman Small Cook Jr., who epitomized the quiet, trustworthy small-town businessman, owning and running Adams' Pharmacy for over 40 years, died this weekend while on vacation in England.

Generations of Provincetown residents grew up at Adams' Pharmacy. Men and women had their morning coffee there before work and children and teenagers had sodas and Cokes after school. Cook was always there, a pleasant and smiling man. His grandfather John Adams founded the drugstore in 1875.

The drugstore has always been an oasis for year-rounders in the desolate Provincetown winter, especially in the 1950s and 1960s when nearly everything else was closed.

"It's always been like a club," said Stanley Snow, 73, a close friend. "Normie enjoyed how people would talk and argue and swap stories. He kept it going even after it became a nuisance to run."

Details of Cook's death are sketchy. He was on vacation in England for the last three weeks with his wife Dorothy and Mrs. Bunny Smith, a longtime friend. The Smiths ran the Provincetown Bookshop until moving to Chapel Hill, N.C. Paul Smith also passed away recently.

The three were due back at Boston's Logan Airport Sunday. Friends began to worry when they did not appear and called Mrs. Smith's bookshop in North Carolina, only to learn that Mrs. Smith had called her granddaughter in North Carolina to report that Cook died either Friday or Saturday of heart failure. He was suffering heart trouble for some time.

It was expected that Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Cook would return later this week. Friends in Provincetown, many of whom had just received postcards from London, felt especially helpless because they had no idea where in England to contact the two women.

Cook, 70, was born in Provincetown to Norman and Jenny Cook. Cook's father was killed in World War I, so much of the work of running Adams' was left to Jenny.

She ran it with a passion. The drugstore opened at the crack of dawn seven days a week to serve coffee to a regular crowd. But Adams' was always lit up at 2 or 3 a.m., as Jenny was stocking the shelves or preparing homemade dessert syrups.

Cook grew up in an apartment in back of the drugstore. The store used to be a tiny corner shop. Enlarged twice, the store expanded to take over most of the

**ADAMS  
PHARMACY**  
EST. 1875

first-floor space.

Cook loved the waterfront as a child, said Snow, whose brother Morris has been Cook's lifelong best friend. Morris Snow now lives in Florida.

After graduating from Provincetown High School, Cook worked for a short time in an automotive repair shop in Boston. His friends described him as a mechanical whiz who could break down and rebuild anything from an engine to a radio.

Cook then studied to become a licensed pharmacist at the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy in Boston. After graduating in the early 1930s, he returned here to manage Adams'. Soon thereafter, he married the former Dorothy Evans of California, whom he met in Boston. He was then drafted into the Navy for a brief service in the Pacific.

The Cooks, both only children, are also childless. But when Joe Ward, then a teenaged paperboy scrubbing floors and washing windows in the drugstore, needed a home, the Cooks took him in for five years.

"I didn't have a place to go and they heard I was having problems," Ward said. "They were parents to me."

Now Ward, who himself graduated from the Massachusetts College of Pharmacy, runs Adams'.

"He was an old type of pharmacist," Ward said. "His true love was what a lot of newer pharmacists consider their heritage. He liked mixing up prescriptions with a mortar and pestle."

But the soda fountain and what it symbolized to him about a close-knit community also meant a lot to him. He kept the fountain going even during World War II, when he wasn't around to help. When he returned, it wasn't unusual for him to skip around the pharmacist's counter to serve someone a cup of coffee.

"It used to be a very personal thing, even much more so than it is now," Ward said. While other drugstores popped up now and then, none with a pharmacist or coffee bar ever mounted any serious competition to Adams'.

Cook was for a long while an enthusiastic

volunteer fireman. Adams' is located next to the old Pumper Station No. 3.

"If he was in the drugstore, he would have that truck out of the garage before the siren stopped blowing," Snow said. "It was incredible. The whistle would blow and he would have the door open, call to find out where the fire was and start the truck engine. There was no one faster."

And he always managed to get his truck smack in front of the fire. He was the first one there and the last one to leave."

"He took what life dished out to him and knocked the hell out of it back," Ward said, describing Cook as a smart businessman, a New England Yankee type who would work 20-hour days and go 15 years without a day off.

He was there if someone needed a loan or couldn't come up with enough money to pay for needed medicine, but at the same time would pay his own bills in five days—sometimes in one day, Ward said.

Cook had a bad heart condition. He had at least three heart attacks in the last year. One time he was stricken recently, he drove himself to the hospital so as not to bother any of his friends.

It was a tough decision for Cook to retire about six years ago, Ward said. He spent a lot of time since then working with electronics and reading, especially about boats and yachting.

During the 50s he raced a Lightning class sailboat. When he didn't have a boat, he often sailed with friends like Snow. Cook enjoyed driving Jeeps on the beach. He spent many summer days on the beach at Hatches Harbor, where he always walked around picking up other people's



Adam's Pharmacy, left, corner of Gosnold Street  
The Fleet must have been in - 1910

trash to keep the beach clean, always with a smile.

He also liked woodworking and in the late 40s amassed a very impressive collection of power tools for cabinet making. But, working with such intensity, he rarely had time to use the tools.

"Things in the pharmacy business were changing too fast for him," Ward said. "When he would go somewhere else, which wasn't too often, he would like to go into drugstores there and he always came back disgusted."

"He never accepted the fact that like most places, drugstores are modernizing so the business end is more important than the professional pharmacist."

Karen Barners, granddaughter of Mrs. Smith reached by telephone in her Chapel Hill, N.C., home yesterday, said Cook died of a heart attack Friday night in London.

According to her grandmother who called Chapel Hill the next day, Cook was rushed to the emergency room at St. Stephen's Hospital in London.

Carrie Merrill of Provincetown, a former schoolteacher and friend of Cook, called the Chapel Hill bookshop run by Barnes and her husband Michael after the Cooks did not return to Boston Sunday as scheduled. A shop clerk related the news of Cook's death to her.