

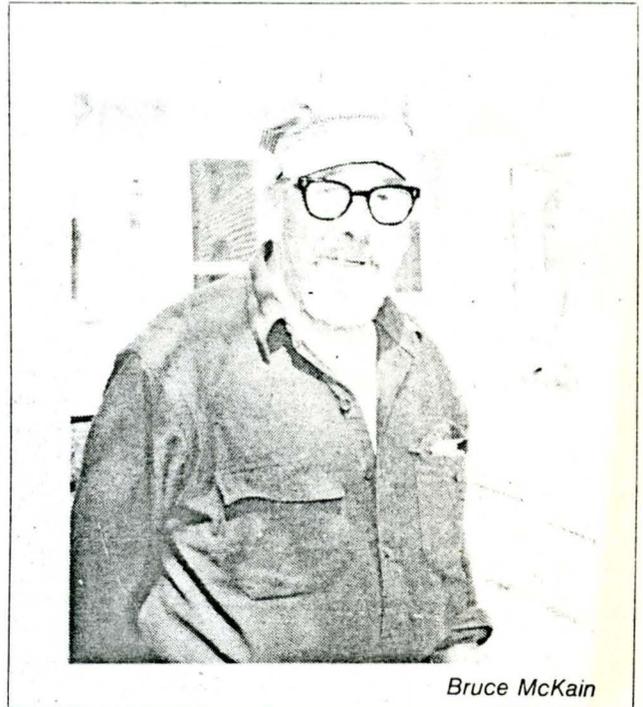
KELLY'S CORNER

by Jan Kelly

(Provincetown) While all this intense warbler watching is going on in the main ring, you can shift your attention as other species go by your view. Watching two kingbirds swoop the pond for insects and harass nesting birds with each landing brings an appreciation of acrobatic skill and a bit of humor into your bird-watching. The Indians called this domineering fly catcher "kingbird" because of its unflinching courage and brazen attitude, daring to attack any bird of the skies. And its Latin name "Tyrannus tyrannus" connotes its bold and fearless behavior. I was sympathizing with the struggling and too earnest redwings when the third ring began its entertainment. Very low, swooping just at treetops, four turkey vultures put on an aerial display that kept you mindless but for it until they were out of sight, fifteen or twenty minutes later. Turkey vultures soar, they barely flap their wings, but use thermals and updrafts for fuel. Their wings are dihedral or arched in a slight "V" as they soar and their primary or wing tip feathers are spread like fingers. More than half the underside of the wings is whitish-greyish. You should have no trouble identifying this vulture. You may not see the head too clearly but scavenger birds have featherless heads and long strong beaks. They can tear flesh and won't mess their feathers up with blood. The turkey vulture flies the lowest of the scavenger birds also. The theory is that this is the only scavenger that finds its prey by smell. The proximity to the ground and the large nostrils have led to more than 100 years of inconclusive experiments. Turkey vultures in the bird world are referred to as "T.Vs." That's always worth a few laughs.

"T.V. 2 o'clock. Red beads and Givenchy gown,"
"T.V. over pines one o'clock. Gold lamee, Gucci single strap heels, cellophane Aubergine." Bird watching in Provincetown.

The holiday weekend is a different set of activities to whomever you speak to. Residents that is. Instead of a jazz brunch, tennis or family time, Ghee Patrick, Barbara Rushmore, Georgia Coxe, and I weeded the Grace Hall parking lot, Sunday 9 am to 1 pm. That was our penance for planting the area. The stream of cars and tourists never stopped. Nadgie Burr instructed one driver after another with the patience of a preschool teacher. As Ghee and I were struggling with the west side, the parade of funseekers was quite close. I turned to Ghee and said, "Can you imagine, Ghee? They're probably saying, Those poor women working on a holiday Sunday. Probably they get about \$5 an hour or so." We had a good laugh, noting how many of them toted back bulging Marine Specialities shopping bags. Many of us can't get used to this early



Bruce McKain

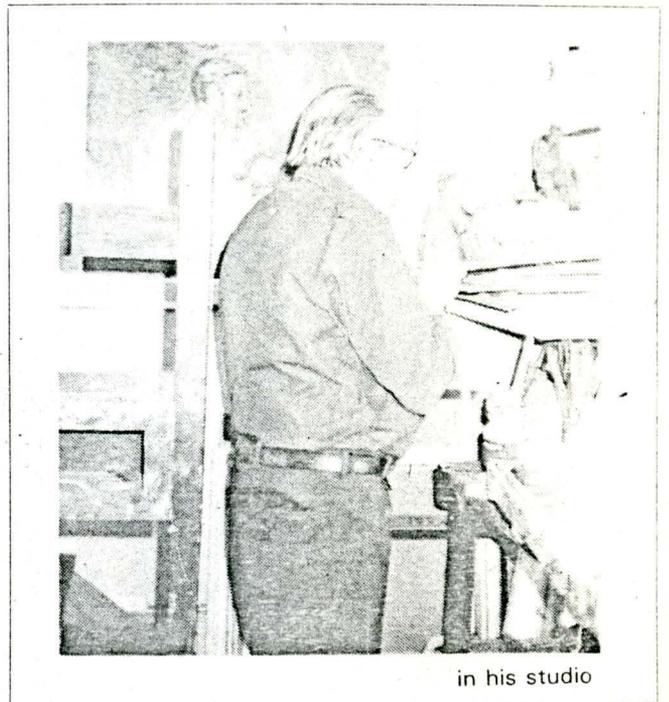
Memorial Day weekend, so we just pretend there are two of them and business goes on as usual. Spring weather is so unpredictable, that Blessing of the Fleet is soon enough for frivolity.

I went to visit an old friend the other day. Old because I've known him since I came to Town and old because he'll be 86 years old on June 22. But in all other ways young, Bruce McKain has health, humor, charm, talent, and a wife, all of youthful persuasion. When I came into the yard Bruce was digging in the flower beds with his engineer cap shading those elfin blue eyes. We stepped over an inlaid brick fish, past the Peter Hunt mailbox and the Bill Boogar delicate bronze scallop door bell into the spotless house which was a carriage barn 100 years ago. Amy McKain's grandfather was an MD and made his calls by horse and buggy from this house. In the immaculate kitchen your eyes would go to a tiny darkened bronze free form flower on a shelf. Bruce was helping Bill Boogar one day at his shop as he was making rudder gudgeons for the government in WWII. A drop of bronze splashed to the floor and formed itself to this spontaneous sculpture. It's about one inch high but demands your attention. Then our attention went to Bushmill's and conversation. Bruce McKain, a long-respected and talented artist was born in 1900 in Freetown, Indiana. While at Indiana University Bruce was caught by a professor he was drawing in caricature form. The professor remarked acerbically "You should

go to art school." Enough said, Bruce was off to John Herron for the beginning of a life of art. In 1928 he first visited Provincetown to study with Charles Hawthorne. In 1929, Hawthorne went to Europe so Bruce stayed in Indiana. That was Phil Malicoat's first year here, so he and Bruce met the next year and were life-long friends. Richard Miller and Henry Hensche were active at the Cape School of Art in Hawthorne's absence. In 1930, they all came together in a studying and painting process. The beaches, the gardens and the side streets were visited daily by young artists learning to paint in the outdoors, responding to natural light. The talent of this era grew and was recognized far beyond the tiny two street fishing village. Bruce has paintings hanging at the John Herron School of Art, at the University of Illinois, was at the New York World's Fair, and the Seligman Gallery in New York.

In 1952, he won 1st prize at the Art Association. In 1955, Bruce won three prizes at the Hoosier Salon in Chicago. Bruce sent two pictures, "Cape Cod Landscape" and "Lumber Yard—Winter," but managed to win 3 prizes. The landscape was considered "The Outstanding Oil in the Exhibition." Summers in Provincetown and winters in Indiana went on for 4 years. Bruce rode box cars with the pre-Depression hobos and worked for \$5 a day and board. As the Depression moved in, that became good pay for tending fields three miles long. In 1939, Bruce married Amy Birge, thus ending the Indiana part of his life. He settled on Pearl Street, began to pay Poll Tax, and never moved again. The Beachcombers on Saturday night, for the past 54 years, the dunes, pastoral environs, and the harbor views constantly feed Bruce's artistic imagination and talent. His crocus paintings are ingenious and a piece of life. His winter scenes explain thoroughly and wordlessly an off-season Provincetown. I've never seen a Bruce McKain painting I didn't like. That's surprising—when an artist is painting from an inner view rather than aiming to please the public and the viewer.

The interpretation of Nature is true and you always know it's a McKain, despite the varying subject matter. Bruce is in such good shape. We climbed an arrow ladder up to his studio for a look at past art as well as the one on the easel, wet and incomplete, a promise on canvas. I saw wonderful animal studies of rhinoceroses, tigers, and elephants done when Bruce worked for a circus in Florida for a brief stint. I saw western scenes; horses, valleys, mountains, a west before my time. Nudes, flowers, marine and dune paintings live side by side in the racks in a lifetime of art. I listened to stories of John Whorf, John Noble, Katzioff, and Coulton Waugh. Each story had its own humorous twist and with Bruce's mischievous smile, it's entertainment at its best. Good company is a gift.



in his studio

One short visit can last a lifetime in memory. The topics expand and multiply. Bruce saw Halley's Comet twice. 1986's was not the spectacular "long, bright tail that took over one quarter of the sky in 1910." The next event Bruce "will stay around for" is the 500th anniversary of Columbus' discovering America. Conrad Malicoat is working on that.

Bruce McKain arrived in Provincetown when the value of art was natural to daily living. People painted because they wanted to exercise a talent and use it all their lives. The style of living made it possible for a person to live by small means, achieve and be happy. An involved artist, Bruce served two terms as Director of the Art Association, 1941-42 and 1961-64. He has helped the Town that gave him hospitality and inspiration. We must not lose these qualities that draw and aid young artists. We must find an alternative for housing and studio space so that 86 years from today, we will still be able to honor and enjoy artists who have spent so many years reproducing the beauty of the Town we all love so much. It's time to endow the status of "National Treasure" to individuals who make our lives richer, to begin it and continue it. It's time to make the lives of those who chose the pursuit of art and beauty rather than money a little easier and worth it all by recognition. It's true an artist like Bruce McKain is happy in the life he has created around himself, but many of us are missing the understanding and the lessons of such a deliberate life. Learning from each other can be a pleasant lesson. By the example of his chosen life and the steadiness of time, Bruce McKain has a lot to teach us.