

THE GOLDEN AGE

By Josephine Patterson

Post Script V

The true Horatio Alger story of the rise of an orphan boy from rags to riches, had part of its locale in Provincetown.

John Kiley's only home had been an orphanage in Boston, until he was adopted by a kind Cape Cod woman whose affections he won when she visited the Home, looking for a boy to "found out" as they used to call the orphans; "found-out boys". This orphan boy remembered his name, John Kiley, and he was eight years old when he left the orphanage for his new home at Truro, Mass. He had no heritage to boast about and his name had a Celtic sound not as stable as Rich, Nickerson or Snow, but he had a name to be reckoned with, for he was on his own when at ten years of age he was put on a vessel to cook for a crew of hearty fishermen.

John's schooling was meager. However, he cherished his spelling books from which he frequently quoted many of its wise sayings, the most familiar one was "When thou can't not extricate the load call on Hercules". Needless to say he was the Hercules.

His talent for carpentering was more pleasing to him than his culinary art, so he left the galley, and built houses. His first one was a present to his bride, Sally Rich.

Truro was having a religious fervor at this time. People were selling their home and going to the hills to await the second coming of the Lord as had been prophesied by a visiting revivalist, but John kept his religious convictions within reason and didn't dispose of his property until the Truro harbor filled in with sand-bars, then he knew the fishing business was doomed. His desire was to migrate to Boston and carry on his building activity there, but his wife, Sally, was rooted to Cape Cod and would go no farther away than Provincetown, so John agreed and bought a strip of land from the highwater mark to Miller Hill. He sold his houses in Truro with the exception of two. These he floated over on rafts and reassembled them again on a strong foundation of heavy beams purchased from a factory which had been manufacturing salt, but was discontinuing this industry. These beam sand timbers were seasoned stock and many builders took advantage of purchasing it from the salt-works company.

After laying out a narrow road which he named Kiley Court, he built houses on either side until all lots were filled, then he was attacked by insurance agents who would argue, "Mr. Kiley, you must carry an insurance on your property. With eight houses and 16 families using wood burning stoves and kerosene lamps you must protect yourself from fire." To which his reply would be firm and final, "The Lord will take care of me and my property." Although threatened many times by neighborhood conflagrations he never had a fire. His faith in spiritual defenses seemed impregnable.

Not having a normal childhood, working from sun-up to sun-down, he had little sympathy for the children in the neighborhood who lovingly called him "Old Man Kiley". However his swamp garden of strawberries, cucumbers, tomatoes and luscious grapes won their hearts when he allowed them to help themselves.

Although very saving, he would spend any amount on music, giving the town ten dollars yearly so the town band would play when going past his house.

On Tuesday afternoons the members of the family would gather around the Melodion and Mr. Kiley, as he was called in his home, would lead them in singing Psalm tunes, at the same time playing with one finger on the Melodion. Should any of the children giggle he would reprimand them with a couple of taps on the head from his violin bow.

Many book pedlers visited the town at that time and they were welcome to the hospitality of the Kiley home. However, should their books disagree with the views of John and his wife, the agents would find their books burned when they arose the next day, and they were asked to leave.

On one of his rare visits to Boston he had purchased a pair of shoes that the water wouldn't go over the top of, so he said. He used to sit on some rocks which were at the base of his short wharf, and when the tide would rise and surround him then someone would go in a boat and bring him ashore. However he always claimed that those shoes he bought at "Georgie Marsh's" saved him from getting wet.

One thing John Kiley never knew was that he had paid double taxes to the town of Provincetown on his property, being taxed on the strip of land as a whole, then each time he built a house he was taxed for house and land. Fortunately the tax rate was not very high.

His life was a shining example of honesty and Christian living with one omission. He would have his "night cap", appeasing his conscience by remarking, "Just because someone makes a fool of himself it wasn't going to deprive him of his toddy."

When the occasion arose in the English department at Harvard College for the class to write an essay on a self made man, his grandson could think of no better subject than John Kiley, so John has gone down in the pages of history at Harvard College.

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Around These Parts

By Frank Crotty

Peter Hunt, the man who introduced peasant art to American furniture, has built himself a small modernistic home in back of his art shop in Orleans. It has a living-room, bedroom, kitchen and bath. Walls on two sides are mostly glass. It was designed by Nathaniel Saltonstall, Boston architect.

Because of the limited wall space he cannot possibly hang all the paintings he owns at one time. So he periodically changes them. He owns paintings by Picasso, Maurice Sterne, John Whorf, Hans Hofmann, Lodewijk Bruckman, Ethel Edwards, Sol Wilson, Chaim Gross, Howard Gibbs and Bruce McKain.

A native New Yorker, Peter has lived most of his life there and in New Jersey. He has been going to Cape Cod for 35 years. He operated shops in Provincetown until a year or so ago. This is the seventh year that he has been operating the Orleans shop.

He is the author of three books: "Peter Hunt's Workbook," "Peter Hunt's How-to-Do-It Book" and "Peter Hunt's Cape Cod Cookbook."

The last time I viewed the paintings on his walls I said to him: "How come, Peter, I never see any Peter Hunts on your walls?"

He laughed and threw his hands in the air. "Gosh," he said, "I've got no room for Peter Hunts."