

ALONGSHORE.

BY JOHN BELL



"Fighting Bob" Evans, Rear Admiral USN, was pretty fed up with Provincetown by March, 1906. His sailors of the North Atlantic Squadron had spent \$600 to buy and fix up a sports field for their off-duty recreation, only to have five clergymen and three selectmen sign a written protest against their using it on Sundays (as told here last week).

Now these eight small-town officials had written another letter and sent it, over his head, to Charles J. Bonaparte, Secretary of the Navy. In it, they implied that Evans had ignored their previous letter.

This time, the clergy invoked a 1692 Puritan blue law "to preserve the sanctity of the Sabbath." Three selectmen stood sanctimoniously in favor of "law and order."

Advocate editor Howard F. Hopkins knew better. He printed readers' comments that suggested the clergy were sore because their flocks were flocking to watch baseball instead of attending church. The selectmen, he hinted delicately, were annoyed because a few drunken sailors were exposing non-enforcement of Provincetown's anti-liquor laws.

Adm. Evans, a practical man of action, had offered to compromise. He would let his men come ashore only after church hours, and he told the selectmen just where to find the five liquor sellers.

He was frustrated on both fronts.

The ministers, like Shylock, insisted on obeying the letter of the law. The selectmen told him they could not stop the illicit booze merchants.

"Give me permission," Evans said, "and I'll rid the town of them." The selectmen took no action on his offer.

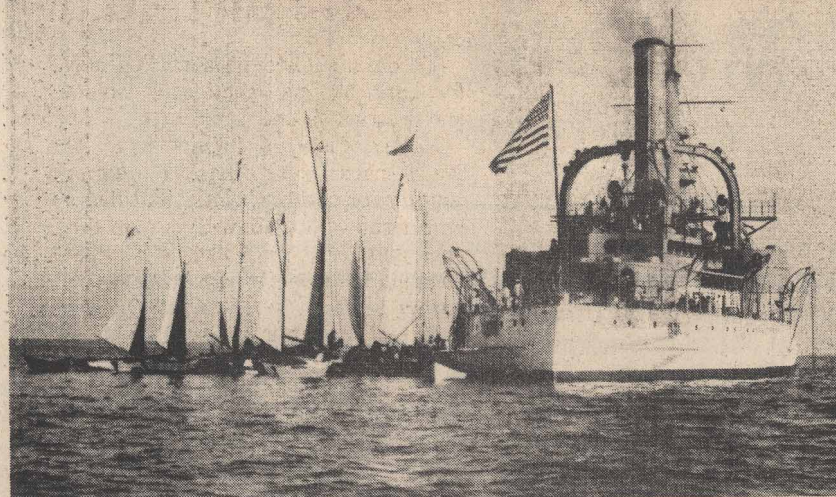
SILENT MAJORITY ROUSED

Early in May, David C. Stull ("the ambergris king") sent from New York a Times clipping. It quoted Adm. Evans as saying the fleet would come briefly to Provincetown, then proceed "to various ports along the Atlantic." Rockport, Mass. and Rockland, Me. were mentioned. Both had invited the "jackies" to come and play there.

Businessmen rushed another letter into print, urging Secretary Bonaparte to ignore the clergymen's letter. Scores of citizens besieged Town Hall and demanded the selectmen withdraw their official endorsement of the letter. Town fathers gave in. They also scheduled a special town meeting to consider just one article—to see if the town would vote to invite the fleet back to Provincetown.

The counter-protest was signed by editor Hopkins, photographer Irving L. Rosenthal, druggist John D. Adams, Seamen's Bank treasurer William H. Young, fish merchant Gideon Bowley and "one hundred and thirty others."

Lawyer Raymond A. Hopkins, the editor's brother, made the motion in Town Meeting. Three hundred



ARRIVAL OF A BATTLESHIP meant good business for Provincetown's fleet of tenders and party boats — if sailors played ball with them.

citizens voted unanimously to have Town Clerk Seth Smith write to Evans, inviting him back. However, it was merely a vote of confidence. The Sunday blue law remained.

NEVER ON SUNDAY

Although Secretary Bonaparte's reply showed he considered the incident closed, Fighting Bob was still angry. His stiff note to the selectmen says in part, "There was no statement in your first letter that there was any law prohibiting games of sport on Sunday, nor was I aware of the fact."

But since the law existed, he said, he was duty-bound to obey it. There would be ball-playing, but not on Sunday. He added tartly, "I am a believer that Monday is as much the Lord's day as Sunday, and that every day is one on which 'charity and good will toward men' should be followed."

On June 21, Secretary Bonaparte wrote to Joshua T. Small (a pro-

baseball man), endorsing Admiral Evans' solution to the Sunday problem. The fleet would by-pass Provincetown.

NAVY HUMOR

Out-of-town newspapers had commented freely on Provincetown's teapot tempest, so it was known to all the sailors. Late in June the USS Louisiana anchored in the harbor. When the shore boats sailed out to solicit business, and asked "Can we come on board?", the answer came derisively, "Can we play ball Sunday?"

In the 4th of July parade, one float represented the USS Maine, Admiral Evans' flagship, "with her broadside and turret guns frowning upon the gaping crowd." A large placard on each side read, "Can't play Sunday ball. We are bound for Rockland, Maine."

MAN OF HIS WORD

Except for a 30-day stay by the Louisiana, the Navy kept away from Provincetown all summer. Occasionally ships would anchor overnight to prepare for target practice the next day. The rattling thunder of their guns continued to shake the houses around Cape Cod Bay. But now it was a reminder of the dollars no longer spent here by sailors.

From Rockport, came the news that Admiral Evans had eight battleships and 14 torpedo destroyers stationed there. Perhaps with malice, he told reporters the Navy men spent "thousands of dollars a week" ashore there.

The whole fleet did come, late in September, but only for a one-day sports festival. This time the town welcomed Adm. Evans warmly. Houses and shops flew flags, and sailors found they had a newly hardened road, instead of loose sand, to walk to Evans Field on.

Those who read that week's Advocate learned that Provincetowners were seeking special legislation that would exempt Evans Field from the Sunday blue law. But it was "too late, my love." From that time on, other New England ports enjoyed most of the Navy's business.

IRONIC CHARADE

During the Louisiana's visit that summer, four men—one of whom may have been Adm. Evans' son, an officer aboard—rigged a 12-foot workboat to look like a fully-gunned brig. They landed at Railroad Wharf dressed as an admiral, his executive officer, Uncle Sam ("in rainbow-hued vestments") and Miss America.

"Miss America," wrote Hopkins, "was becomingly garbed in a blonde rope-yarn wig and a white gown, cut decollete. Her arms, bare to the neck, were plentifully tattooed. Her gown failed to hide all the lingerie of the charming maiden.... a fathom or so of trousers looming bloomer-fashion below the nether edge.

"As the ship neared the float, the commander sang out, 'Let go the starboard anchor' and that piece of ship furniture — labelled 'weight, 6,000 pounds' — was duly let run. It floated, for it was made of wood.

"The men said they the mayor. The 'admiral' Town Hall with his field tonic bottles slung went direct to the harbor selectmen's room, respects, and in the asked where they could The selectman's re history.