

THURSDAY, APRIL 8, 1948

A PAINE OF TRURO

By GUSTAVUS SWIFT PAINE

Nancy Paine Smith was one of the Truro Paines, though she may have been born in Provincetown. Many remember her. In 1929 Miss Mandy Smith, a Southerner who ran The Cabin, a New York tea-room, told me that when I went to Cape Cod I must meet a Mr. Paine who ran the Provincetown Inn. In a moment after I had introduced myself to him, he jumped into his car and told me to follow him to his sister's house. I found that Nancy Paine Smith and her husband, Billy May, had in their house a shop where they sold photographs, books, and souvenirs of the Cape. She herself was blind.

A fairly tall, straight woman of great dignity, she preached. I afterwards learned, in one of the Provincetown churches. She had published some years before "The Provincetown Book," which though slight has great charm. I have been re-reading it today. Her style is full of her character. Like "The Provincetown Book," the other two volumes, "A Book about the Artists" and "Our Heritage," show how a modern Cape preacher can be mellow, humorous, understanding, and yet in the Cape tradition.

Her husband's photographs are surely among the best Cape Cod pictures ever taken. We got Billy May to take some pictures of the old Paine house in East Brewster. I wonder what has become of his countless plates, not to speak of the prints. They constitute a remarkable record of the Cape at its finest.

(Some of these pictures are in this book)

The last time I saw Nancy Paine Smith, she and her husband had closed their shop. I gathered that things were not going so well with them. Yet all her dignity was intact. I asked for her book, "Our Heritage," which she had let me see in manuscript. She had unsigned and signed copies. Of course we bought a signed one. She put her hand gently on the head of my son, Bela, then five, and felt of him eagerly, softly, here and there. Then she reached over to a shelf nearby and brought to him some photographs, asking him to choose the one he liked most. He chose one of dunes. The dunes have always thrilled him. She at once put it into an envelope for him. We had it framed for him to hang over his bed in the country.

Though she insisted that her husband would want to see us, Billy May was having a long afternoon nap. Waiting, we begged her not to awaken him. Finally we came away without seeing him. Our memory of her is of a thoroughly integrated Cape Cod presence. We are proud to have known her even slightly.

Reading "The Provincetown Book" today, I liked again what she says of Cape turns of speech, and of many little Cape ways. Then I read what she says of the Tercentenary in 1920. Today when so many of us are working for better interplay between all kinds of people, I find one of her remarks tremendously moving:

"There was no more significant group than the Portuguese with their fishing gear and the motto—

Our Saviour fed the Multitude
Two thousand years ago;
We are Fishermen.

At their head marched a man (a "Portuguese") descended by seven lines from Mayflower passengers."

