

At Home Behind Billy May's Yellow Flag

Nancy Payne Smith in Her "Cape Cod Parlor"

Every one who stays longer than "between boats" at Provincetown, goes up to Billy May's. From the blinker by the old ship model shop, we turn right, up the narrow road that leads to Chip Hill, and there at the top of the hill is Billy May's yellow flag and Billy May's sign. On this particular day we were not looking for the beautiful mounted photographs of sand dunes, of fish wharves, or of sailing boats, which Billy May's signature has made famous, but we were looking for the artist's wife, who wrote "The Heritage" and "Provincetown." To the blue-eyed, white-haired lady who greeted us at the door of the "Cape Cod parlor" we said, "Is Mrs. Nancy Paine Smith here?"

"Alive and kicking" answered the lady with the friendly smile. "I'm Nancy Paine Smith and my husband is Billy May." (One has to get used to Cape Cod names before it is possible rightly to figure out relationships.)

When she asked us in we found ourselves in a typical Cape Cod house, albeit a modern one for it was built in 1850! Mrs. Smith showed us her "shrine" of pictures in one corner of her living room, in the center of which was a photograph of a kindly, dark-eyed man with the "Irishman's fringe" common to so many Cape Codders. This was Mrs. Smith's father, to whom her book is dedicated, and to our surprise he was not a sea-captain.

"Every one doesn't like to follow the sea," she explained gently, "and my father was sea-sick and homesick on his first trip out. So he conducted his business on land, managing a fleet and attending to the business end of the foreign trade. He is the Cape Cod gentleman to whom my book is dedicated. He died a long time ago but I miss him every day."

"We must preserve the traditions of the Cape," she went on. "I've tried in 'The Heritage' to leave something permanent. I have written it for Cape Codders more than for other people. They seem to like it too," she added smiling. "I've camouflaged a little but they tell me they can recognize most of my characters. One of the pictures mentioned in the story hangs there—" Nancy Paine pointed to the opposite wall, where hung a quaint old print entitled "Reading from the Scriptures." "When my great-grandfather, who owned that picture, heard some one declare that the world was round, he said, 'Well, I know it ain't raound, for I've sailed all over it and I've never sailed daoun a slope yet.'"

There is no doubt but that Nancy Paine Smith loves her Provincetown.



*Wrote. Surv. Telegram
October 5, 1930*

Died Sept 2, 1940

NANCY PAYNE SMITH

She writes not only of it, but for it, and she talks enthusiastically about it. She will tell you of the whaling industry, of the days when Provincetown was the richest town in Massachusetts per capita, of the great "frozen fish" industry today, of which we know but little, unless we hear sometimes the quiet chug of the out-going fishing boats at 3 o'clock in the morning, or the return at 9. By noon the fish, still flopping, are in the freezers.

"People will always love Provincetown if they stay long enough," said Mrs. Smith proudly. "But you've got

to do more than come down on the boat, eat at some hole-in-the-wall and go away again. Those people only see us as hot and dirty, with streets that squeeze their cars into the sidewalks and smelly old fish-wharves. The Cape has charm and artists have found it out. Provincetown is full of them. And of writers, too."

Mrs. Smith is right about her beloved Cape Cod. The charm of it will become better known each year, but she acknowledges with a little humorous smile that one just can't keep fish and wharves from smelling.

H. B.

"Billy May" Passes, Pictured Cape End August 2, 1943 William M. Smith Saw Photographic Business Change In 63 Years

Funeral services were held yesterday afternoon for William May Smith, 85, who died at his home at 15 Tremont Street Monday afternoon following a long illness. The services were held at the late home with Dr. U. S. Milburn, summer pastor of the Church of the Redeemer, officiating. Interment was in the Provincetown Cemetery.

Mr. Smith, or "Billy May" as he was known to so many people of the town was a noted photographer, having devoted most of his life to that profession, and during his many years with the camera made an invaluable pictorial record of Provincetown and the changes it has undergone.

He was born in this town on September 28, 1857, the son of the late William W. Smith of Barnstable, a Cape End boatbuilder, and Mary C. Johnson of Provincetown. He attended the schools here and after high school he went into the photographic business, then still, comparatively, in its infancy, with George Nickerson, as an apprentice, and later joined him in the business.

In 1888 Mr. Smith married Nancy Paine who was then studying for the ministry at Tufts Divinity School and moved to Boston where he continued in the photographic business.

After an absence of 20 years during which Mrs. Smith filled several pulpits in New England, with ten years at Newfields, New Hampshire, where she was instrumental in building up the church, Mr. and Mrs. Smith returned to live in Provincetown and here Mr. Smith opened a photographic studio at his Chip Hill home. Both of them took a keen interest in this community and Mrs. Smith was regarded particularly as an authority on Cape End lore. She was the author of "The Provincetown Book" and "Our Heritage." She died on September 2, 1940. Two years prior the couple observed their golden wedding anniversary.

In 1937 Mr. Smith retired after 63 consecutive years in the photographic business and during that time saw it pass through a great many changes in materials and methods, from the cumbersome use of the wet plate methods to the comparatively simple use of film negatives of vastly more speed. He was the last living member of the old Puritan Band which provided music for parades, and the summer concerts and in which he played the bass horn.

Mr. Smith was a member of the King Hiram's Lodge, the Anchor and Ark Club, and until his death a loyal and faithful attendant at the Church of the Redeemer, Universalist Church.

Surviving are his daughter-in-law, Ruth Smith, widow of Paine Smith who died two years ago, a granddaughter, Esther, and one great granddaughter, Marilyn, all of Medford Hillside.

Nancy's house