

# Memory Goes Back To Old Criers

## Mrs. Bicknell Ruminates On Old Provincetown Custom

George Washington Ready, Walter "Hoppy" Smith, town criers of 50 years ago, and Amos Kubik, present heir of the Provincetown Crier dynasty which goes back unbroken into the Colonial period, are the subject of a character sketch by Mrs. Mary Bicknell, summer resident and



Town Crier Amos Kubik, as he looks after Labor Day, inviting folks to "Come Back For—Stay Through Autumn" here.

wife of the noted etcher W. H. W. Bicknell.

Like many another Provincetown resident, Mrs. Bicknell finds a peculiar color and glamor in the personalities of the Criers, and in her story "Not To Mention Mr. Woolcott", which follows, she gives her impressions of the last three bell-singers.

By Mary Bicknell

(Written for "The New Yorker" and promptly rejected)

I see by the papers, as Mr. Dooley of fragrant memory often used to begin his dissertation, that Amos Kubik, Town Crier of Provincetown, is in town once more, raising any local echoes which are not already working overtime with his truly

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stentorian voice. There he is, photographed as natural as life, along with Mr. Alfred E. Smith, also a rather well known character, in his way.

Of course we're very well accustomed to a Town Crier in Provincetown; in fact I doubt if the Oldest Inhabitant can remember a time when we didn't have one. The memory of this deponent goes back only as far as George Washington Ready, who was said to have a really remarkable vocabulary in private life (which was probably the best place for it), but officially restricted himself to what he was paid to cry and wore, while so engaged, his own regular clothes, remarkable only for advanced dilapidation.

He lived to be very old, and cried almost to the last, but eventually he was gathered to his fathers (presumably), and Walter (commonly known as Hoppy) Smith succeeded him. Hoppy was said to have been a helfun in his youth, and I believe it is true that he was obliged to notify the Boston police, in case he planned to visit that city, so that they could be on their guard, no doubt. Forewarned is forarmed. But by the time he attained this dignity of the Town Criership, he was so lame that he hardly rated as a menace.

Hoppy went a little further, sardonically, than Ready, for he added to his natural equipment of a prodigious voice an imposing cap with a rather naval-uniform flavor, and with TOWN CRIER on the front in gold letters, which he always wore at an extremely rakish angle.

He charged a dollar for crying only on the front street (Commercial Street to you), and his was to take the accommodation (but we know what you mean if you call it a bus) down the East End and walk back crying, then up to the West End as a passenger, returning to the Center in his professional capacity.

His habit was to ring his bell, and then to shout "NOTUS:" double forte but when I had occasion to engage him to cry for the Theatre I spent considerable time on the first morning drilling him in calling "HEAR YE . . . HEAR YE . . . HEAR YE!" . . . interspersing it with ringing the bell. He was letter perfect in the part when I left him, but a little later I found that he was just saying "notus" as before, and I realized that it was useless to work against what was evidently a conviction, and who was I, to tamper with a man's convictions!

Well, at last he died, too, and he was in turn succeeded by the present incumbent, Amos Kubik—a Czech or Lett or something by birth, who had

however lived in Provincetown long enough to be practically a native; a big upstanding man with a big square face, looking just the way the staunch and somewhat severe Pilgrim Fathers ought to have looked, whether they did or not.

Having cast the part perfectly, the Town Fathers naturally thought next of his costume, and decided upon a complete Colonial dress of a sort of mulberry color, and very well he looks in it, too. The trippers just eat it all up, and he now poses for snapshots obligingly but with a somewhat blase air, having learned from much experience just how to stand with regard to the light, the background, etc., to bring out his best points.

For a year or two of course his costume (no, he doesn't wear it all the time) elicited some razzing from his old friends and associates, the fishermen particularly. They are often witty, so that I regret missing what a group of them, sitting, as usual, on the steps of the barber-shop at the foot of Pearl Street, called out to him (in what I once heard a woman describe as a "sort o' voice"), but his reply was clearly audible. "Don't forget, fellers," he said earnestly, "I'm being paid for making a fool of myself!"

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# TOWN CRIER TAKES WASHINGTON PRESIDENT NOT IN PICTURE

John R. Small, Provincetown Summer Resident, Describes  
Visit of Amos Kubik to Nation's Capitol—  
Is Feature of National Folk Festival

Special to the Provincetown Advocate

by John R. Small

Washington, D. C.,—This past week, for the first time in over a score of decades, residents of Washington and visitors in the capitol city of the nation heard the cry of "Hear ye! Hear ye!" and ensuing notices read in loud, clear tones by a town crier. It was Amos Kubik, America's last official town crier, who journeyed here from Provincetown, Massachusetts, and opened each performance of the Fifth Annual National Folk Festival held in Constitution Hall on May 6, 7, and 8.

Not since the early colonial days when George Washington and other Virginia gentlemen used to ride in to the country village of Georgetown on the muddy Potomac from their estates up and down the river, had the area which is now Washington, D. C., harkened to a crier's voice.

### Right at Home

On Thursday afternoon, Kubik was accosted at the corner of Fourteenth Street and Constitution Ave. by a young lady from the Department of Agriculture building. After engaging the Provincetonian in conversation, she borrowed his famous bell and had to pose for fellow government employees. Within a few minutes a large crowd gathered. Kubik explained his duties to the onlookers and delighted his audience by giving a demonstration of his crying.

## TOWN CRIER'S WIFE

By VIRGINIA SCOTT MINER

**O**PITY the town crier's wife! Bewail  
Her fate in the village green,  
For a town crier's wife was not to be heard,  
But only—and silently—seen.

Day in and day out must the helpful spouse  
Do her duty—which was merely  
To swell the crowd while her man aloud  
Called lustily out his "Hear ye!"

No hint of knowledge ahead of time  
Must slip her serene control;  
Her husband's tale must be all the news,  
The rounded and perfect whole.

Yet many's the time that, hearing hoofs  
Beating their angered drum,  
She's been the first at the gate to wait  
Some quite unofficial crumb

Of news not meant for the crier's rounds—  
Some morsel of talk that she  
Can bring, like a jewel, out to show  
When company's in for tea!

That the town crier, an official maintained in Provincetown to symbolize the past, is frequently "scooped" by newspaper and radio these days? However, even in the heyday of criers, those officials often were scooped—and by a barrel, of all things. Oldtime harbor masters who supervised docks in every village would hoist a barrel on a hinged pole similar to a wellsweep when they spied a ship approaching. The townspeople learned from the elevated barrel—not from the crier—that the packet boat or the mackerel fleet or the lumber schooner was about to dock.

That there is still a vestige of the Revolutionary War on the Cape? During the fracas, chimneys on the houses of Tory sympathizers were painted white with a black rim at the top. Many chimneys are still painted in this fashion.