



This picture was taken around 1920, according to Harry Kemp, Provincetown's Poet of the Dunes, who has lived for many years in his shack in the vicinity of the Peaked Hill Coast Guard Station, which can be seen in the upper right, before it was moved further inland. In the left foreground is the older station in which Eugene O'Neill wrote his earlier plays and which is so touchingly described by Agnes Boulton in her book just published, "Part of a Long Story."

Fire Levels Famed Peaked Station, Lone Sentinel Of O'Neill-Lost Ships

By Steve Barrie

Another famed Provincetown landmark was swept away on Sunday night, when the old Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station on the backshore went up in flames. Although de-activated since the end of World War II, "Peaked Hill," as it was called colloquially, was cherished by all because of its great past, and the gallantry of the Coast Guardsmen who manned it.

At about 9:30 p.m., Mrs. Laura Fowler, who is spending the Summer in a cottage in the dunes, saw the station on fire. She drove in her jeep to town to sound the alarm. John C. Van Arsdale, flying near the station in a Provincetown-Boston Airline plane, also

spotted the fire. Later, Arthur Costa of Art's Beach Taxi Service said when he was driving a group of visitors on his sunset drive along the beach at 7:45 there was no sign of fire, but he did see two adults in the building, one in the top lookout tower and the other sitting in a second-floor window sill. Many people who are in the dunes for the Summer said the smell from the fire, which for a time seemed to threaten nearby cottages, seemed to indicate that "the place had been soaked with gasoline or kerosene."

Since the fire department equipment could not get out to the

dunes, nothing could be done to save the old station, although members of the department went out in the department jeep. Coast Guardsmen from the Race Point Station also went to the station, but by the time they arrived, the building was completely in flames. The fire could be seen from Plymouth and from miles up the Cape. Sparks were blown toward the ocean by southerly winds.

The station was built about 1915 to replace an older one which was being gradually destroyed by the sea. This was the station which Eugene O'Neill had bought some years before, and in which he liv-

ed while he was writing many of his early plays. In the early 1930's, long after O'Neill had moved away from Provincetown, the building was washed away in a severe storm. The new station was moved back several hundred feet to insure its safety.

In the years since its de-activation, windows and doors disappeared, and there was no equipment or furnishings inside, the building being little more than a shell. It was a favorite spot for campers.

Fire Chief James J. Roderick called in the State fire marshal's office to determine the cause of the fire. Yesterday the Chief said the cause was unknown, and that damage could be assessed at \$1,000, as that would be the probable value of materials and lumber in the vacant structure.

In the sands and the shadows of the dunes are the stories of the officers and men of the old Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard station that was razed by the Sunday night.

The violent torch that angrily spat thousands of feather-like, red-orange flames against the summer sky, brought back the legends of the old station that will live forever.

The ghosts of Captain Ambrose Cook of the Peaked Hill Bars station, of the Pulitzer prize winning playwright Eugene O'Neill, Captain Sam Fisher, Daisy, the white, life-saving horse and the "girl of the fog" still roam the dunes where the station once stood. In her wonderful book, "Time and the Town," Mary Heaton Vorse tells of listening to Captain Cook's stories of shipwrecks, rescues and the legends that hang over Peaked Hill like a ghostly mist.

One was the story of the Coast Guardsman who was making his rounds, and suddenly out of the fog loomed a beautiful girl. He was so startled to see someone so far from town that he was speechless. The next night she again appeared. He was so smitten with her loveliness that he begged her to visit him the following night. She smiled softly at him and said, "I'll see you soon again, and disappeared into the night. Within a few nights a Portuguese ship was wrecked. The Coast Guardsman saw his "girl of the fog," on the deck, with a child in her arms. The surfboat came alongside "on the heave of the wave." She threw the child to him, and then jumped, missing the boat. She was swallowed up by the sea. It was evident to the Coast Guardsman that it was her spirit he had seen in the fog and that she meant for him to take care of her child. He adopted the little girl, and brought her up.

Mrs. Vorse also tells of seeing Daisy, the life-saving horse, "clumping past on her big sand-splayed feet— for even horses get sand-footed on the dunes—taking Captain and Mrs. Cook to the station. Daisy wandered at will around the dunes, but when the dinner bell rang she'd come with her tail up in a smother of flying sand. If she got to the door before the men got to the table, she got fed. Otherwise she would have to wait till they were through. And wait she would, snuffing and puffing at the window and peering in. She would wander up behind some stranger when a group of visitors were looking at the lifeboats and affectionately nuzzle a shoulder. If women screamed at this, Daisy would look at her

vice, as it was called then was established. It included Peaked Hill Bars, Race Point, Highhead and Wood End. Off Peaked Hill there is a treacherous sand bar and inner bar, which are constantly shifting and changing their positions. The space between the two bars has been a death trap for hundreds of vessels, and thousands have been lost along this "graveyard of the Atlantic." Human courage and great drama performed by the superhuman efforts of the Coast Guard have been played against the sea and the sand of Peaked Hill.

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