

## Kibbie Cook House Has Been Home Of Mary Heaton Vorse Since 1907

This week Frank Crotty, feature writer for the Worcester Telegram, writes of Mary Heaton Vorse, author and one of the founders of the Provincetown Players, and her home, the Kibbie Cook House and its yard where many famous artists have set up their easels and where the children of Provincetown have played happily since 1907.

By Frank Crotty  
Worcester Telegram Feature Writer

Vying with Rockport's Motif No. 1 (the old fishhouse) as the most painted spot in America is the Kibbie Cook House and its yard in Provincetown.

Mary Heaton Vorse, the writer, who owns the house and lives there the year 'round, is pretty proud of her house and her yard.

She says: "Hardly a day goes by when artists aren't out there painting. One of John Whorf's paintings of the yard was made into a colored print and I have seen it in such distant places as Los Angeles and in hotels in Europe. I have also seen it in mid-ocean, on the Ile de France. The

list of famous artists who have painted it would fill a book, to say nothing of the hundreds of anonymous painters who have done it."

She is happy that the yard has been a favorite spot for artists and a play spot for children for over half a century.

She was unhappy from 1952 to 1956 while the town was trying to take the yard away from her by eminent domain to turn it into a parking lot.

"The town's efforts," she said, "finally proved impractical and I was happy about that. It would have been a shame to spoil this painter's and children's delight."

She was helped to keep her place through the sympathy of many townspeople.

"I was also helped," she said, "by the good offices of Selectman Frank Henderson and the work of Town Lawyer Richard Gerould. Mr. Gerould found the place was beyond the legal limits a town may take property for a parking lot."

Mary Heaton Vorse has been a friend to children all her life. The yard of the Kibbie Cook House first became a mecca for youngsters when she moved into it in

1907. With her then were her husband, Albert White Vorse, a writer and editor who died three years later, and their two children, Heaton White Vorse and Mary Ellen Vorse. Heaton and Mary Ellen now live in New York City where he is connected with an electoral concern and she is the wife of Frederick H. Boyden. She writes occasional pieces for magazines.

In Provincetown Mrs. Vorse is known as "Mother Vorse" by four generations who have played in her yard and eaten in her kitchen.

Now 75 years old, Mrs. Vorse's mind is sharp and she well remembers the early days of Provincetown's fame. Many of Eugene O'Neills plays were read in her home and were first presented in her wharf fishhouse.

It was through her that the founders of the Provincetown Players went to the little fishing village. Besides herself, they included Wilbur Daniel Steele, Susan Glaspell and her husband, George Cram Cook, Hutchins Hapgood and his wife, Neith Boyce.

The first play "Constasy," written by Neith, was performed in the Hapgood home in the fall of 1915. This was the Provincetown Players start and the beginning of the Little Theater Movement in America. The next year the Players moved to the Vorse wharf.

Mrs. Vorse is a delightful person to visit if one is interested in hearing about the early days in Provincetown. She has had a most interesting life and has known every famous person of the last 50 years. She's known everybody from Lillian Russell and Floyd Dell to Edna St. Vincent Millay and Big Bill Haywood.

With the death of Mr. Vorse in 1910 she was forced to become the breadwinner for her family.

"There was only one way I knew

how to earn money," she says, "and that was by writing.

She was war correspondent for McCall's and Harper's Magazines in the first World War and for various publications in World War II. She has served in about every country in Europe.

In his unknown days Sinclair Lewis occasionally visited the Vorses in their 200-year-old Kibbie Cook House. They realized his great talent even in the early work he was then doing.

Says Mr. Vorse: "He gave me my only claim to immortality by publicizing my recipe for writing: Apply the seat of your pants to the seat of a chair."

Over the years she has written more than 300 articles and short stories for various magazines, such as Harper's, Century, Atlantic, Scribner's, McClure's, American, Everybody's, Collier's, Woman's Home Companion, Ladies' Home Journal, Forum, Cosmopolitan, Survey, Outlook, New Republic, Watson's and Good Housekeeping.

Her books include: "Time and the Town," "Footnote to Folly," "Labor's New Millions," "Strike," "Breaking in a Yachtman's Wife," "Story of a Little Person," "Ninth Man," "Growing Up," "Men and Steel," and "Fraycar's Fist." Her books have been translated into many languages including Russian and Japanese.

Mrs. Vorse says she'd love to have a copy of one of her books called "The Prestons" which was published in 1918 and which was a best seller. It was a story of an American family. It is a collector's item and she does not have a copy of it.

With the success of her writing she was able to hire a nurse to look after her children. She was then able to devote more time to her writing and spend more time in Europe. She worked hard during those years.

She early became interested in the labor movement and much of her writing has been on this subject.

"I was always principally interested in improving living conditions and women," she says.

She was born in New York City, Oct. 11, 1881. Her parents were Hiram Heaton and Ellen Blackman.

"Eight of my ancestors fought in the Revolutionary War," she says. "They were mostly officers. I come from a run-of-the-mine

American family. My forebears were farmers, statesmen, mechanics, doctors, etc. It was an average early generation family."

As a child she spent her summers in Amherst and she loved the place.

She married at an early age and a great blow was the death of her husband and her mother on the same day.

"My husband died of a cerebral hemorrhage and my mother of a heart attack," she says.

It was then that she began her writing as a breadwinner. She was eminently qualified, having learned some things about it from her husband.

"When I was 13 or 14 years old," she says, "I could speak three languages. German and French in addition to English. I was also able to read and write in German. As a child I simply loved to read. I remember when traveling with my parents I used to pray that the book I was reading wouldn't end too quickly.

Two years after Mr. Vorse's death she married Joseph G. O'Brien of Berryville, Va. He died three years later. They had one son, Joel Heaton O'Brien, who is now with NBC-TV in New York. Joel and his wife, Jill, have two

children, Gael, 10, and Sally, 8, who are living with their grandmother in Provincetown. They have been there all winter and they love it.

The late Ray Stannard Baker, who also wrote under the pen name of David Grayson, was a distant cousin of Mrs. Vorse. A first cousin of hers was the late U.S. Rep. Allen T. Treadway of Stockbridge.

Speaking of Stockbridge, Mrs. Vorse's father founded the Red Lion Inn there and it remained in the family through four generations. It was sold to others about a year ago.

Of the late Jane Addams, the Chicago social worker, Mrs. Vorse says: "I never knew anyone whom I could revere so much. I remember she used to say that she never knew a person from whom she couldn't learn something."

"Yes," Mrs. Vorse says, "in those early days after Mr. Vorse died I worked hard. I'd spend hours dictating. I remember one day — after hours of work — I sat down and mended a few stockings. After I'd finished the children's

the nurse smiled kindly a time and said: "Mrs. Vorse, don't you feel better now that you've done some work?"

"You know," she adds, "a woman's family looks upon writing as a sort of selfish pastime."

Well, "Mother Vorse" is still living in the Kibbie Cook House on Commercial Street, with a fine view of the harbor, and she is revising her book, "Time and the Town," which is all about Provincetown.

"Bringing it up to date," she says.

Occasionally she looks out of her window and smiles happily at the artists and the new generation of children in her yard.