

In Provincetown, where the two settled at the New Central Hotel, Eugene established a regimen of writing and, to recover from months of irregular living, cross-country walks. Despite the sharpness of March, the two went tramping for hours at a time, O'Neill silent for the most part, whether absorbed in the severe beauty of the scene — gray sky, leaden sea, dun-colored sand dunes — or lost in thought over some troublesome pages.

Unlike the playwright, DePolo spent little time brooding over his work; a kind of writing machine, so prolific that he had to use several pen names, he could quickly grind out love stories, animal stories, adventure yarns, whatever the market demanded. In the evenings Eugene would revise his day's output or read, while Harold, ever eager for some "action," would hustle up a poker game at the Atlantic House, the other and livelier hotel in town.

Some days after their arrival they found themselves co-starring in a comedy of errors that began as melodrama. While having lunch on March 28, 1917, they were approached by a grim-faced officer who said they were under arrest, and when Harold asked, "What for?" the other replied, "You know what for!"

#### The "Spies"

Figuring that small-town morality was at the bottom of it, that poker games were forbidden, Harold tried to tell the man that his friend was innocent, that he never played cards. When the man brushed this aside and still refused to divulge the charges, DePolo and O'Neill demanded to see his warrant. "This is my warrant," said Constable Reuben O. Kelley, and flourished a pistol.

The word spread fast. Minutes later as the pair were being marched to the lock-up in the basement of Town Hall, some of the crowd that seemed to have sprung up from nowhere called out, "Kill 'em, kill the German spies!"

The bewildered writers, who at last had some idea of why they had been arrested, were booked on "vagancy" charges and held incommunicado in separate cells as an investigation got under way. Provincetown, like the rest of America, was feeling the effect of the war in Europe; the fear of saboteurs and other undercover agents of the Kaiser, keeping pace with the rising war fever in the nation, had finally reached the remote fishing village.

During the first year or two of the war the prevailing mood in America had been neutralist, despite an under-swell of pro-Allied sentiment inspired by the "rape" of little Belgium. President Wilson, even after the sinking of the Lusitania, declared that we were "too proud to fight."

Tin Pan Alley, echoing his stand, churned out such numbers as "Our Hats Off to You, Mr. Wilson" and "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier." When he ran for re-election in 1916 his supporters came up with the slogan, "He kept us out of the war," but the spirit of the times soon shifted; the word now was "Preparedness!" Early this year, in 1917, Germany announced it was embarking on "unrestricted" submarine warfare, Washington shortly broke off diplomatic relations, and the Broadway tunesmiths, ever alert to the popular drift, were now chanting "Liberty Bell, It's Time to Ring Again" and "America Needs You Like a Mother — Would You Turn Your Mother Down?"

Even pacifists became jingoists, the sober-minded frightened and angry, as a growing number of munition plants were destroyed by fires and explosions of mysterious origin, as U-boats began sinking unarmed American merchant ships.

It was an inopportune time for two strangers to appear in Provincetown, strategically located at the end of the Cape, especially after personnel at the U.S. radio station in North Truro were, as The Advocate reported, "annoyed and rendered suspicious by the action of prowlers."

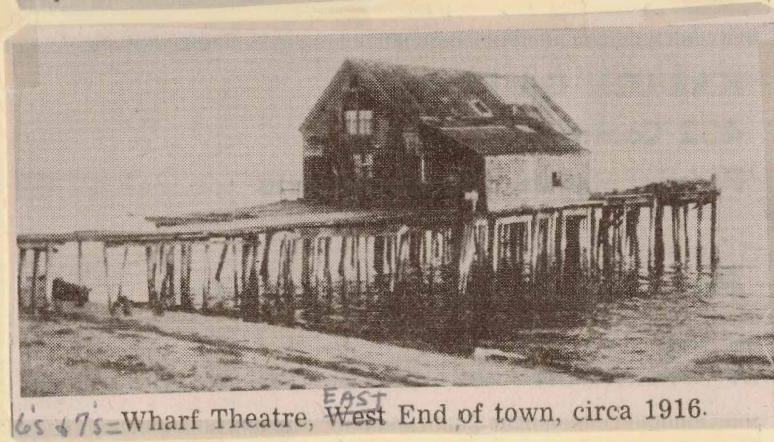
Constable Kelley, on being notified of the trespassers, did not have far to look for suspects. Those two at the New Central — what were they doing here out of season, why were they always wandering around the dunes and in this kind of weather? They couldn't be up to any good; he had better act fast before they slipped away.

The arrest sent shock waves of rumor through the village: the two were armed, they had drawn guns on the constable, they had not only plans of Provincetown Harbor and the radio station but wireless equipment for communicating with the U-boats. Meanwhile, as the stories ballooned, the local police sent word to Secret Service authorities in Boston, who immediately dispatched agent Fred Weyand to the scene.

After a weary seven-hour trip during which his car suffered two punctured tires, Weyand arrived to grill

the prisoners. It was not long before he was convinced of their innocence; Eugene, besides identifying himself as the son of actor James O'Neill, probably referred him to his good friend, John A. Francis, the local realtor and general store man, whom everyone in town respected and liked. In court the following morning the charges were thrown out, O'Neill and DePolo set free.

Nevertheless, despite this official exoneration, some villagers remained suspicious and felt that O'Neill, together with his friend, had been cleared only because his father was a famous actor. Fifty years later a visitor in Provincetown found old-timers who believed that "the real story" never came out.



65 & 75 - Wharf Theatre, West End of town, circa 1916.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5, 1968

#### ALICE BOULTON O'NEILL DIES IN N. J. HOSPITAL

Death came Saturday in a Point Pleasant, N.J. hospital for Mrs. Agnes Boulton O'Neill Kaufman, the second wife of the late playwright Eugene O'Neill, acknowledged to have revolutionized American drama and in winning international fame to have given Provincetown a permanent place in his story.

The former Mrs. Eugene O'Neill was 75. Separated from her third husband, Mac Kaufman for many years, she had lived alone. She died in Point Pleasant Hospital after undergoing surgery. She was the mother of Eugene O'Neill's two surviving children, his son, Shane, of New York City, and his daughter, Oona, married to Charlie Chaplain and living in Switzerland.

Agnes Boulton and Eugene O'Neill, who came to Provincetown before their marriage and lived here after they were married in 1918 — in one of the late John Francis' apartments — spent here together some of the most eventful periods of their stormy 10-year marriage.

It was here that Shane was born, delivered by Dr. Daniel Hiebert, who had known O'Neill at Harvard and had befriended the couple when O'Neill, plagued by alcohol and often without funds, wrestled with his own dark genius to write the plays that were to win him fame and a Nobel prize.

Many oldtimers here, the majority of them now dead, had known Agnes Boulton well and some of them had tried to quiet the storms that broke out in the turbulent O'Neill marriage.

O'Neill and Agnes Boulton, herself a writer, met in 1917 in a Greenwich Village saloon dubbed "Hell Hole" by the artists, writers and sundry others who gathered there. Agnes Boulton had been 24, a widow and the mother of a young daughter. Their romance was as tempestuous as their marriage.

Biographers of O'Neill have not hesitated to give O'Neill's moody temperament and his outbreaks of violence a goodly share of responsibility for the hectic temper of their marriage.

O'Neill himself had been married before, a brief marriage that ended when O'Neill's family arranged a divorce with the acquiescent Kathleen Jenkins, now Mrs. Kathleen Pitt-Smith who lives in Little Neck, Long Island.

The Boulton-O'Neill marriage was under a prevailing threat, too, from the shadow of another woman, the wife of the writer John Reed, who openly acknowledged her feeling for O'Neill and took lightly his marriage to Agnes Boulton.

After the divorce in 1929 of Agnes Boulton and O'Neill, the playwright married the former actress, Carlotta Monterey, who has a home in New York City. But Agnes Boulton shared a critical period of O'Neill's stormy life and his biographers have given her a permanent place in it.