

Late in the Summer of 1919 there appeared on the streets of Provincetown a family that at once drew our attention. The man was strongly built, of about fifty, blonde, with a squarish face, under a broad brimmed hat and over a black flowing tie. Seemingly incongruous was the fact that his wife was a chic Frenchwoman. Completing this family were two small boys. We needed no telling to know that the head of this family was John Noble, whose coming to Provincetown had for some time been heralded by Richard Miller and others of the old Paris group.

"Bill" as everyone called him—his real name coming to light only later—was soon known to artists and nearly everyone else in Provincetown, for he was gregarious, loquacious, ungrammatical, and eloquent. He had spent years in Paris and in London, and of what had transpired at the Cafe Dome or at the Cafe Rotund or of what exploits he had had with Augustus John, he was ever ready to tell. But mostly he talked of his native state of Kansas, relating in vivid terms the colorful history of that state. He told us of Coronado, of Quantrel, of John Brown. He told us of the running battle across western Kansas of the U.S. cavalry with the Cheyenne es-

caping from the Oklahoma reservation to their homeland to the north. He told us of the great cattle drives from Texas over the Chisholm trail to Abilene, and this, of course, would lead to the subject of Wild Bill Hickok. All of this he pictured as though he had been a participant, although we realized this would have involved certain inconsistencies in chronology. There is no doubt, however, that John had been at the opening of the Oklahoma strip, when at the crack of a gun land-hungry people raced across a line on horseback and in every imaginable type of conveyance. Years afterwards John was to paint this episode, and the result we were to see in his studio in Provincetown. In showing this canvas he would point out amid the throng a man on a high-wheel bicycle and remark, "I seen him and I put him in". Interestingly enough the man on the high wheel was borrowed by another Kansas artist, John Stuart Curry, who used it in his wall painting in the Kansas State Capitol, and still later John's man on the high wheel cropped up in the movie version of the opening of the Oklahoma strip.

Flareup Compromise

As has been noted in an earlier installment of these notes, John



One of the most colorful artists in the history of the Art Association, which has included many, was the late John Noble who saw it through the building stages.

Noble became director of the Art Association late in 1920. His appointment came as a compromise there being at the time some flare-up of tension between modern and conservative. John was, for that period, something of a modern and yet acceptable to both factions.

In May, 1921, the exhibition space in the Town Hall was found no longer available. Consequently, on the evening of May 26 an emergency meeting of members, held in the Beachcombers Club, unanimously voted to have the president appoint a committee to consider turning what was called the "east building (the present gallery)" into a museum, and, at the same time, tearing down the "west building (Bangs house)". This committee was to report to a general meeting on May 31, and at the appointed time a positive finding was brought in by the group, which consisted of Sarah Munroe, Mrs. Henry Mottet, Frederick McKay, John Noble, E. Ambrose Webster, I. H. Caliga and Charles W. Hawthorne. The group from then on seems to have proceeded as a building committee. To raise funds for the new

building, the president, as empowered, named a Ways and Means committee made up of John Adams, Dr. Percival Eaton, Frank Potter, Max Bohm, Agnes Weinrich, Mrs. Grace Hall, Mrs. Charles W. Hawthorne and Mrs. Eugene Watson.

This period was an active one, indeed, for the Art Association, and on June 9, 1921, we find the membership voting unanimously for the president to name a committee to draw up a constitution and by-laws and to take other steps towards the incorporation of the institution.

Selected for this purpose were Charles W. Hawthorne, Max Bohm, George Elmer Browne, John Noble and Dr. Percival Eaton. Missing are the minutes of a member's meeting, presumably held on June 16, at which the conditions of incorporation would seem to have been adopted. We find that by June 20 the incorporation had been completed and that the direction of the Art Association was in the hands of the following twelve trustees: Gerrit A. Beneker, John Adams, Horace F. Hallett, Mrs. Grace Hall, Fred-

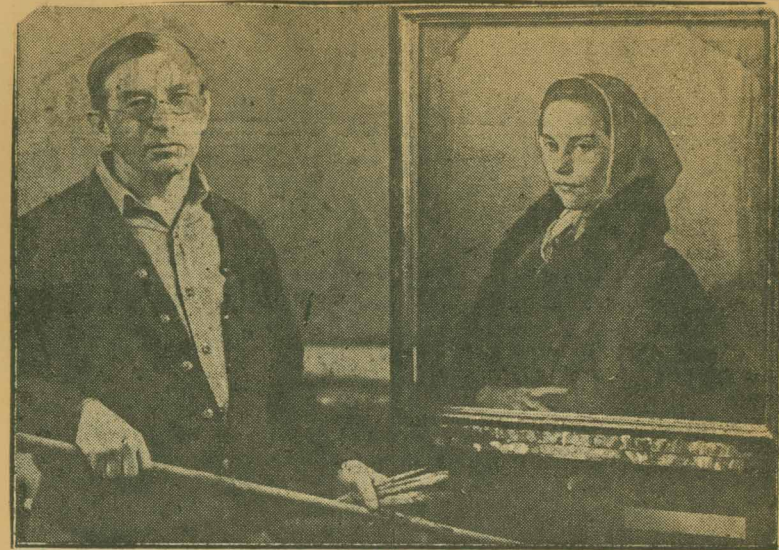
erick Boynton, Frank E. Potter, William H. Young, Mrs. Henry Mottet, Judge Walter Welsh, Dr. Percival Eaton, Myrick C. Atwood and Sarah Munroe. These trustees then elected by ballot the following officers: president, William H. Young; honorary vice-presidents, Charles W. Hawthorne, E. Ambrose Webster, George Elmer Browne, Richard E. Miller and Max Bohm; director, John Noble; corresponding secretary, Harry N. Campbell. In line with the new constitution, only the above trustees, the treasurer, Willis S. Rich, and the recording secretary, E. Ambrose Webster, had been elected by the general membership.

Unfortunately, the minutes both of the members and of the trustee's meetings are rather sketchy for the period here concerned. One misses the earlier and fuller accounts, which we will recall were by Nina S. Williams. Outside of the treasurer's book there is little or no reference to the gallery then being readied. We know that the work for the most part was done by the local firm of Frank A. Days and Sons. The building—without the little gallery and the Hawthorne gallery, which were later additions—was completed in time for the opening on July 31, 1921, of the seventh annual exhibition.

Work Of Committee

The plan for the gallery seems to have originated within the building committee. Director Noble was probably on hand most of the time while work was in progress. We remember going into the incomplete building on the afternoon just after the outcome of the Dempsey-Charpentier fight had become known in Provincetown. "He could have knocked him out in the first round, only he didn't want to make them (Frenchmen everywhere) feel too bad," John gloatingly told Joe Days who was directing his workmen. "I don't care one iota," said Joe, accenting the last two words. As a juxtaposition of inequatable view points, this exchange seemed to us a minor classic.

An inspection of the treasurer's book indicates that the cost of the new building, including grading and planting of the grounds, was about \$5,250. At the start of the project the assets of the Association included the two house properties now combined in the present site. Against these there was a \$3,000 mortgage. In addition there was \$830 readily available, including cash and a Liberty Bond purchased in 1917. Remarkably enough, by the end of the season of the building, the improvements



Richard Miller mixed his rich colors with rare wit.

had been paid for, save for about \$1,500, of which a part consisted of non-interest bearing loans from certain members and citizens of the town. By 1923 the only indebtedness on the Association property was the original \$3,000 mortgage, which the Association was now in a position to reduce.

Funds for the new building were raised in several ways. During 1921, \$1,000 came from the sale of life memberships, \$770 from a lawn fete at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Will Young, \$540 from dues, \$400 from advertising in the catalogue, \$360 from a cos-

tume ball, \$286 from admissions, \$230 from lectures, and so on. At the same time operating costs of the Association were relatively small. For instance, only \$130 was paid in wages to the staff, which consisted, aside from the director who was not paid, of a part time janitor and a desk attendant, the latter getting \$12 a week.

The Opening

To enter the new museum on the opening Sunday afternoon, one had to step on a box to get up to the front door. Inside the gallery the Reverend Henry Mottet was invoking the blessing of God



Max Bohm