

Provincetown Marks Passing Of Famous Poet Of The Dunes



Farewell

Tell them, O Sky-born, when I die
with high romance to wife,
That I went out as I had lived,
Drunk with the joy of life.

Yea, say that I went down to death
Serene and unafraid,
Still loving Song, but loving more
Life, of which Song is made!

Harry Kemp

In Memoriam

Died in his Provincetown home August 8, 1960

At the left Harry Kemp (in Pilgrim costume) is shown with the model of the Pilgrim Woman Doin' Her Wash, by Sheila Burlingame, and which the Poet of the Dunes urged placing near the First Landing in the West End.

Dune Poet Leaves Beloved Cape End Had Colorful Life As Literary Figure

"I said When I'm alive no more
And my soul at last goes free,
You'll find me walking on the
Dunes
And down beside the Sea.
So if you glimpse a wavering
form,
Or front a vanishing face,
You'll know that I've come back
once more
To my accustomed place."

"Poet of the Dunes" by Harry Kemp

Death drew the curtain on one of the most colorful personalities in the long history of Provincetown and known in many parts of the world, in the passing Monday morning of Poet of the Dunes Harry Hibbard Kemp. He was 76 years old.

The poet, who had been in ill health for some time, had lived for several months in a small cottage off Howland Street, built for him practically single-handed by Mrs. "Sunny" Tasha, and it was here that he was found gravely ill Monday morning by Mrs. Grace Atkins, Public Health Nurse, who had stopped to make a routine check. Mrs. Atkins summoned Dr. Daniel H. Hiebert and the Provincetown Rescue Squad. Oxygen was administered by the Rescue Squad but he died at 11 a.m., less than an hour after he was discovered by Mrs. Atkins. According to Dr. Hiebert, death was due to a cerebral hemorrhage.

Ohio Born

Born in Youngstown, Ohio, December 15, 1883, the son of Wilbert Elijah and Ida Hibbard Kemp, he attended Mount Hermon School in Mount Herman, Mass., and the University of Kansas. Known in those days as the Vagabond Poet, the Villon of America, the Hobo Poet, or the Tramp Poet he however neglected studies to read the classics and left home at an early age.

He was given the last rites of the Catholic church by the Rev. Leo J. Duart of the Church of St. Peter the Apostle. He had been received into the Church on June 6.

Harry Kemp's ashes, according to his wishes, will be divided, half to be spread over Peaked Hill Bars on the back shore here, where he lived in a lonely shack for many years, and half in Greenwich Village at the corner of 14th Street and Houston Street, where he lived as a young man and started his climb to literary fame.

Harry Kemp had considered Provincetown his home since 1913

when he and others from Greenwich Village began spending summers here. Those were the days of George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, Mary Heaton Vorse, John Reed, Mabel Dodge, Hutchins Hapgood and Neith Boyce, Max Eastman and Ida Rauh and others. And it was here that the Provincetown Players were formed and plays put on at the original Wharf Theatre. And it was here, in 1916 that an unknown playwright, who shared a shack on the back shore at Peaked Hill with Harry Kemp, read his one-act play, Bound East for Cardiff, to the Provincetown Players. His name was Eugene O'Neill.

Ambition Realized

Harry Kemp's ambition was to live and to die a poet and it was for his poetry that he is best known. But he is also well known for his extremely frank autobiography "Tramping On Life," which tells the story of his earlier days as a tramp poet and his novel "Love Among the Cape-Enders," published in 1931.

Among his better known works are The Cry of Youth, poems; Judas, a four-act play; The Thresher's Wife, a narrative poem; The Passing God, poems; Chanteys and Ballads, poems; The Sea and the Dunes, poems; More Miles, a novel; The Bronze Treasury, an anthology; Boccaccio's Untold Tale and Other One Act Plays; The Golden Word—An Outline of a Non-Ascetic Religion. He wrote much poetry during his later years here in Provincetown and his latest collection, Poet of the Dunes, was only recently published here.

Harry Kemp's life was packed with adventure. In his younger days he rode the rails with a volume of Keats tucked under his belt, took a trip around the world with only 25 cents in his pocket, was stowaway on a boat to England where he landed under arrest and was saved from going to jail only by an appeal to George Bernard Shaw. He spent several lusty and adventurous years in Greenwich Village and was one of the most outspoken disciples of the "Golden Age" of America's literature.

Lived In Dunes

After he came to Provincetown, the Poet of the Dunes lived for a number of years in a shack in the dunes at Peaked Hill Bars where he tramped the dunes and the great beach, and went swimming daily, Summer and Winter, and walked back and forth from Prov-

incetown over the dunes carrying his food and supplies.

In recent years a mellow and less rebellious Harry Kemp became interested in civic affairs of Provincetown. Perhaps his greatest contribution to his adopted town was his fight to proclaim to the country—and to the world—the fact that the Pilgrims landed first at Provincetown before going on to Plymouth. He was a founder of the Provincetown Pilgrim Association and for a time its president, and each year he and other members reenacted the Landing of the Pilgrims here and the First Wash Day on the shore of the harbor in the far West End. One of his dreams was eventually to have a replica of the Mayflower riding at anchor in Provincetown harbor. But part of his dream came true when the Mayflower II, following the exact route of the Pilgrims from England, sailed first into Provincetown Harbor before going on to Plymouth, and he took part in the reenactment of the Signing of the Compact aboard the vessel while it was anchored here.

Through the years his tall erect figure could be seen striding along Commercial Street and the question asked by many a visitor to Provincetown was "where can we see Harry Kemp?" As he grew older he still held his white head high and he still strode sturdily.

Allen Churchill in his "The Improper Bohemians" said, "that for both longevity and robustness of the rebel spirit, Harry Kemp seems to be the noblest Bohemian of all."