

KELLY'S CORNER



The Hawthorne painting



A closeup of Aunt Fannie at age 8

by Jan Kelly

The height of color is now, depending on what the hurricane left. The stiff stems of weeds and asters were bent by the storm. We have a few days before the first hard frost when a cranberry turns its best they say. There are so few this year, though. The "check" sound of the yellow-rumped warblers can be heard on the way to Hatches Harbor.

The insect sounds are fewer and the few flies left are always the most brazen of the season. Spiders are active, preparing for winter. Ladybugs are rare even though they are advertised and sold by the gallon. The ladybug, or ladybird is from "Bird Four Lady" for Virgin Mary. There are many tales for these small glossy red-backed insects. It is considered good luck if they land on you. The more spots on the back the better. The "fly away home" rhyme was originally to send the ladybug to your lover, a kiss for every spot on the back.

Besides all this whimsey, they eat aphids and that is why they are vacuumed during migration and sold by the gallon. Welcome them to your garden; you never know who sent it.

Do go to the Art Association soon. Paintings from the permanent collection are on display now. This show is so good it could go anywhere in the world. Hawthorne, Bicknell, Moffett, Bohm, Dickinson, Tworkov, Beneker, Kaselau, Palmer, Ravenscroff and Chaffee all in one room.

Hawthorne's painting, "The First Voyage," is of a family. A young man, about 14 years old is having a



Aunt Fannie today

button sewn on his jacket by his mother. His proud and curious younger sisters are looking on. The painting is the most imposing in the exhibit. Those of us who know the painting well are attached to it because our Aunt Fannie is the youngest child in the work. Aunt Fannie, at 8 years old, along with her mother, Clara Smith, 48 years old, born 1867, Brother Jacob, 13 years old, Sister Nellie, 11 years old, posed for Charles Hawthorne in his Miller Hill studio in 1915 for this work. The fees paid for posing were 10 cents an hour for the children and 25 cents an hour for the adult. The family went as a group the first few times to set up the drawing, composition and beginning canvas. Then they went individually for the details. Aunt Fannie was impressed with and liked Charles Hawthorne. The painting was in Town Hall for years, then went on tour. Now it is part of the permanent collection at the Art Association.

Everybody loves to visit Aunt Fannie. Fannie Fields, a chef for all seasons and reasons, rare as a bog orchid in her lack of malice and as straight forward as any intelligent being. There is no pretense, no veneer but a beautiful silver-haired woman who makes you feel the quality of love when you are with her. She has done it to generations of Provincetowners. When I cycled up for a visit Aunt Fannie was sweeping leaves and acorns off her porch. The squirrels keep ever so busy burying the acorns they don't drop on the tourists. No, I couldn't help; this was her exercise. At 78, Aunt Fannie is quite fit.

We stepped into Aunt Fannie's immaculately clean house, which she asked me to excuse because she was "cleaning." She'd have to go a far way to clean; maybe 58 Bradford Street.

I first met Aunt Fannie when I was teaching school here and she was the cafeteria manager and cook, a job Aunt Fannie held for 18 years and as she says, "were her happiest." I never have dedicated much energy or interest to lunch, but when Aunt Fannie was cooking, I did. I always ate my lunch in the kitchen; Aunt Fannie is the best of company. Wednesday was the day I preferred. Chicken soup and chicken salad sandwiches. How can a meal so simple taste so good, I used to wonder. They all tasted good, all 2500 a week. There is only one quality to Aunt Fannie's cooking, the best. Aunt Fannie was born Fannie Smith on Friday the 13th of September, 1907. She was the youngest of seven children born to Chester and Clara Smith. Chester was from Maine and called himself, "A pure Yankee." Clara was born in Cambridge, Mass. and was French. The couple moved here after a Cambridge wedding. Chester worked for the railroad in Provincetown. Fannie learned to cook from observing her mother. Mother Clara cooked with "a cup and a lump." Her only measuring tool was a white coffee mug. The image is still sharp in Fannie's keen mind. Aunt Fannie remembered that I was not fond of sweets as we chatted. She has a catalogue for a mind, people, food, budgets, menus, a full operation from egg to bank ac-

count, thorough thinking. Aunt Fannie first started her cooking career in private families. From there she moved to a grander scale, restaurants. Aunt Fannie opened the Bonnie Doone 48 years ago as head chef; she opened the Moors 46 years ago as head chef, and then she opened the Seaview Restaurant 28 years ago as head chef. Organized and productive, hardworking and ultimately reliable, that's Aunt Fannie. After these successes, Aunt Fannie opened her own restaurant. Ma's Pantry was where Dodie's Pizza is now. That ran for 4 years and then Aunt Fannie opened the Coffee Locker and ran that for 4 years. Those were summer restaurants; Fannie cooked for the elementary school all winter. That was her pet occupation. "The children keep you young," she said. "I was happiest when they would ask for a second piece of bread. I baked 36 loaves, two times a week. The children loved that bread. Josephine DelDeo wrote a poem for the paper about that bread, how my hands "blessed it." Her boy, Romolo was the only child who would eat beets the first time I served them. But I kept trying. When a child said they didn't like something, I would always say, "Put a little on your plate. If you don't like it, you don't have to eat it." It took a while but beets caught on. My husband always said, "You set up so early and work so hard, but you're never tired." It was the children; I went for the kids, not the pay." The pay was \$1650 a year, so you know she means it.

Aunt Fannie has catered to the appetites of approximately 7500 Provincetown-Truro children, and all the teachers, custodians, secretaries, nurses and principals. She has scores of letters written by contented students, all addressed to "Aunt Fannie." So many of her "nephews and nieces" wrote to thank her for the care she took with their childhood lunches. Aunt Fannie has one letter from Mary-Jo Avellar as a third or fourth grader, thanking Aunt Fannie for her delicious home-baked beans. Aunt Fannie said she was going to return it to Mary-Jo one day.

Fannie Smith married Captain John Fields. He was captain of the trapboat "Charlotte" with Deda Roderick as crew. Capt. Nonnie is how John was known. He was one of 12 children, 6 boys and 6 girls. His baby brother couldn't say Johnny, but said "Nonnie." A name for life. It became their son Albert's nickname in the next generation. Daughter Frances Silva works at Peter Tompkins and John "Midgey" Fields works at Land's End Marine. The history of Provincetown is laced with nicknames.

Fannie and Nellie are the only two remaining from the painting and the generation. Nellie married Anthony Perry and they have three daughters, all in the restaurant business, too. Beverly owns Stormy Harbor with her husband, Gordon Ferreira, Eva owns Tip for Tops'n with her husband Babe Carriero and Helen owns Foot-Long Hot Dog with her husband John Grace. There are two generations beyond this with the talent, the dedication and the mellow feeling of life. May Provincetown always be home to Aunt Fannie's and Nellie's descendants.