

BEFORE THE WAR, Europeans visiting Provincetown exclaimed at the quaint charm of the village and its old world atmosphere. Bordering the twisting streets and lanes of the Cape-end community are a number of small crafts and art shops similar to the one pictured above.

MR. PETER HUNT
A4

Introducing



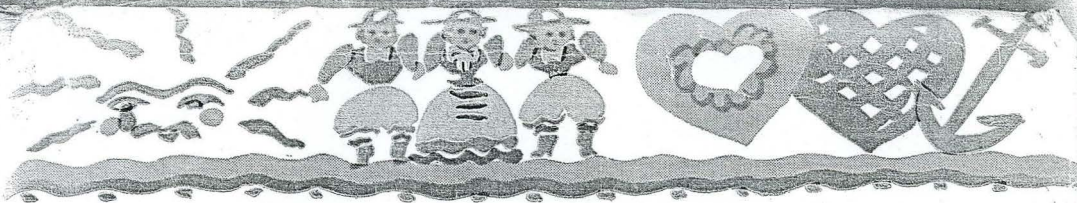
Betty Cavanna

Betty Cavanna has become the teen-agers' favorite writer. Her stories are woven of the stuff youngsters' lives are made of. She talks their language and understands their problems. Her characters are like the people you meet every day. Look for *LISSO YOUR HEART*, *TWO'S COMPANY*, *SPRING COMES RIDING*, *A GIRL CAN DREAM*, *SPURS FOR SUZANNA*, *LOVE, LAURIE*, *GOING ON SIXTEEN*, and *6 ON EASY STREET* — they're by Betty too.

Peter Hunt

Peter Hunt was a successful New York antique dealer when his first glimpse of Provincetown made him decide: "This is the place for me." The furniture remodeling and decorating shop he opened has expanded to world-wide fame, until now a story set in Provincetown would not be complete without him.

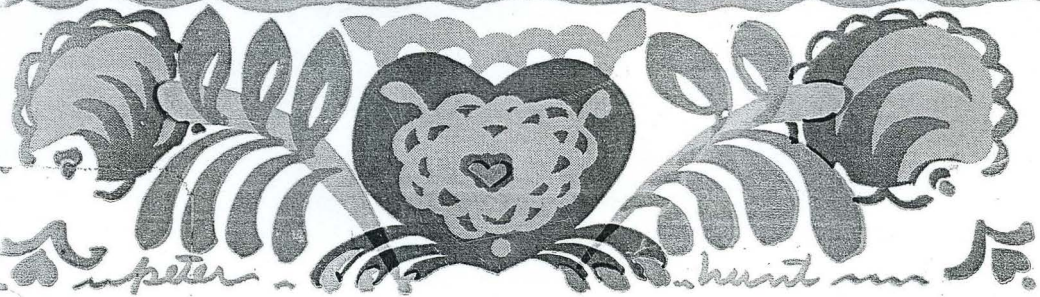
THE WESTMINSTER PRESS



Paintbox Summer



Betty
Cavanna



Decorated by Peter Hunt



Cavanna
anna

714
Hunt, Peter

cape cod DISCOVERIES



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25¢



peter hunt's
unique domain
prolongs season
through winter

John Stevenson enters through his trompe-l'oeil library in Peter Hunt's home on Orleans Cove.

A world of fantasy comes into being wherever Peter Hunt lends his magic touch. For the first time, the tall rambling workshops and display rooms in Orleans on the Cove are open through Christmas.

The spacious lower halls are brimming with treasures Peter brought from Italy and Spain. Ever new conceptions of his world-famous furniture fill the rooms and workshops.

Upstairs Bob Osterhout diffuses the Yuletide spirit through the intimate rooms. There are gifts for every taste and purse and ideas on how to enhance a home.

On the veranda, Bill Sydenstricker exhibits his unique glassware, fired in a new process invented last March, that has already caught international acclaim.



VF PETER HUNT
PETER
HUNT'S
CAPE COD
COOKBOOK

A4

by
Peter Hunt

Illustrated by the author

From Boston baked beans to *grão de bico*, from clam chowder to bouillabaisse, from beach plum jelly to red pepper jam—Peter Hunt's collection of Cape Cod recipes presents a wide variety of delectable dishes in his own inimitable style.

Cape Cod cooking, as enjoyed by the millions who visit Cape Cod annually, reflects the varied life of the Cape itself. There you will find good, old-fashioned New England cooking . . . sea food prepared with the special touch of those for whom the fruits of the sea are close at hand . . . Portuguese dishes made from recipes handed down by the fishermen who brought them from the Old World . . . exotic delicacies from all over the world carried home by the early whaling captains . . . and all-American contributions made by summer visitors from all the forty-eight states.

You will find recipes for all these Cape specialties—and many more—within the pages of this book, linked

(continued on back flap)

VF PETER HUNT

(continued from front flap)

together by Peter Hunt's amusing comments on Cape Cod places and people and by his gay and charming illustrations. A *readable* cookbook, it opens a fascinating door to new adventures in the kitchen and serves as a valuable guide to eating well when *you* visit Cape Cod.

Peter Hunt has been an important figure in Cape Cod life for many years. From his Peasant Village at Provincetown have come ideas in art, decoration and design which have influenced a generation of homemakers. As a writer, artist, designer, decorator, shopkeeper and collector of exciting ideas—in cooking as in all else—Peter Hunt has earned a world-wide reputation.

His friends know him best as the most charming of hosts. They persuaded him to collect the recipes they had enjoyed most at his own table, to add to them some of the most treasured culinary secrets of chefs at famous Cape restaurants and inns, and to supplement these by recipe ideas from the kitchens of Cape Cod homes to make this book.

Read it yourself and you'll find *Peter Hunt's Cape Cod Cookbook* one to enjoy for its delightful commentary on Cape life, cooking and people; to treasure for its handsome illustrations and design; and, most important, to cherish for its mouth-watering recipes.

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VF PETER HUNT

April 16, 1967

Peter Hunt, Artist, Dies at 71; Noted as Furniture Decorator

Special to The New York Times

ORLEANS, Mass., April 15—

Peter Hunt, an artist who applied folk art to the decoration and remodeling of furniture, was found dead yesterday of a heart attack in his home here. His age was 71.

Helped Provincetown Grow

Mr. Hunt was born in New York and in 1919 settled in Provincetown, then a small fishing village. He was influential in the growth of Provincetown as a summer center for the arts.

Like the European working people, whose designs he adapted, Mr. Hunt found the long cold Cape Cod winters afforded leisure for artistic expression.

His first project was decorating an old sea chest after the designs on a Sicilian wine cart. Borrowing the bold strokes, vivid coloring and story-telling technique of the untutored Italian peasants, Mr. Hunt painted the chest, which he planned as a gift for a young girl, with pictures of the happy events of her life.

Decorating furniture in this

manner became his hobby, and his reputation as a folk artist spread throughout Cape Cod.

Later, his designs appeared on fabrics, stationery, clothing and glassware as well as on furniture. He established the Peter Hunt shops in Provincetown. He moved to Orleans 14 years ago and set up his shop there.

Mr. Hunt once explained that all his decorative motifs started with a blob of paint. Since the paint he used dried quickly, the blob could be at once turned into a bit of fruit, a flower, a bird or the head of one of his peasants or angels.

Mr. Hunt had decorated rooms for the late Helena Rubinstein and the Cape Cod Room of the Drake Hotel in Chicago.

He was the author of "Peter Hunt's Workbook" and "Peter Hunt's How-to-Do-It Book," which detail his decorating methods. His hobby was cooking, and he was the author of "Peter Hunt's Cape Cod Cookbook."

A sister, Mrs. Robert K. Heist of Wellfleet, survives.

VF ARTISTS
VF PETER HUNT

Artists
A4

PETER HUNT (BIO) (1896?- 1969)y

b. 1896 or 1898 in New Jersey, served as an ambulance driver in France in WW.I, came to Provincetown in 1920's.

Trained as a painter, but also a lover of antiques, he opened an antique shop here and, combining his two loves, began the decorative painting of utilitarian objects--ranging from pepper mills to chests of drawers--in "primitivist" designs of his own devising.

His motifs drew their inspiration from the Pennsylvania Dutch, German and Scandinavian folklore, medieval religious iconography, and the Provencal region of France.

Hunt's rediscovery of folk art and his "peasant designs" gained him considerable reputation in the 1940's as America's leading exponent of a new, decorative art and design, and initiated a grass roots movement that drew a number of apprentices to his workshop.

Brushing Up on Peter Hunt

A phenomenon in the 1940s, this enterprising artist taught a generation of Americans how to revamp furniture with paint.

By Abby Ruoff



Typical of furniture decorated in the Peter Hunt manner, this painted washstand displays simple motifs, facilely accomplished.

So far, 1990 finds painted furniture more popular than ever. Leading manufacturers are attempting to re-create the charm of Early American stencils and faux finishes, and trendsetting department stores are showcasing colorful collections imported from Scandinavia and Europe. All of this attention brings to mind Peter Hunt, a champion of American decorative arts in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. Calling on his paintbrush, basic carpentry, and Yankee ingenuity to rebuild and repaint discarded furniture, this Cape Cod craftsman helped shape an American art form.

When the Second World War came to an end in 1945, Americans felt free to turn thoughts away from wartime preoccupations and indulge happier notions. Finally relieved of worries about loved ones on the battle-

A decorator and designer specializing in folk art and rustic furniture, Abby Ruoff lives in Woodstock, N. Y.

front or the complexities of food rationing, homemakers could consider sprucing up their apartments and houses. Budget-minded men and women enthusiastically embraced Peter Hunt's do-it-yourself system of decorating.

Borrowing the bold brushstrokes and storytelling techniques of untutored artists of Scandinavian, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Mexican, and Pennsylvania Dutch heritage, Hunt brightened junk-shop bargains and musty attic finds with cheerful pictorials. Taking basic motifs used for ages in peasant design and refining them to create an easy-to-learn formula, Hunt empowered individuals with little or no artistic experience to release their creative energies. To place the novice on the proper path, the artist authored an encouraging how-to volume, *Peter Hunt's Workbook* (Ziff Davis, 1945), in which he demonstrated his technique and stressed the importance of approaching old furniture with a sense of adventure.

Hunt dubbed his method "transformagic," and defined it as the "art of making old things new." Actually, transformagic was much more than an attempt to turn a sow's ear into a silk purse. In America, Peter Hunt's refurbished castoffs became a part of a rich legacy that stirred up memories, generating a new respect for folk art and reawakening the desire to incorporate vivid color and unpretentious handicrafts into everyday surroundings.

By studying Hunt's workbook, collectors can train themselves to recognize an original or to create their own painted treasures in the Peter Hunt manner. A simple guide for determining whether or not an article was designed by Peter Hunt is to know that each motif was conjured from a series of fluid brushstrokes. The basic stroke, which Hunt compared to a fat exclamation point without the dot, might be curved to make circles, repeated in a swag border, or contoured to make ovals, hearts, or whatever image the artist desired. Often, designs were used in combinations that told a story or related the revamped object's new role. Angels bearing stockings or ribbons might adorn the drawers of a lady's dresser, for example, while trompe l'oeil writing paper and quill pens appeared on desktops.

In the early 1940s, Peter Hunt established Peter Hunt's Peasant Village Shops in the center of Provincetown, Mass., where he employed as many as a dozen apprentices to assist him in his endeavors. Though relatively few of the works that emerged from the studios were signed by the proprietor himself, Hunt approved every item sold (a

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PETER HUNT

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fact that makes signed and unsigned pieces comparable in value in today's market). Eventually, Hunt's appealing designs began to appear on fabrics, stationery, clothing, and giftware, and his whimsically painted furniture and fanciful accessories graced some of the most fashionable—and lavish—apartments in New York City.

Hunt's resourceful ideas captured America's interest, and, soon, his work was featured in periodicals ranging from *Life* (November 2, 1942) to *House Beautiful* (August 1943) and *Design Magazine* (November 1951). In 1952, Prentice-Hall published *Peter Hunt's How-to-Do-It Book*, and an illustrated volume of regional recipes, *Peter Hunt's Cape Cod Cookbook* (Hawthorn), came out in 1954.

A Change of Name and Scenery

An enigmatic personality, Peter Hunt became a celebrity who often invented his own biography. According to some renditions, he was christened Frederick Lowe Schnitzer in 1896 in New Jersey; other reports place his birth in Manhattan. When and why the artist changed his name, and how he came to settle in a

fishing village at the northern tip of Cape Cod, are mysteries. One theatrical account suggests that, in the early 1920s, Hunt arrived in Provincetown wearing a long black cape, with two Afghan hounds in tow. Hunt's own reminiscence suggests that in 1921, on a cruise to Maine, "we put into Provincetown in a storm. I was utterly charmed by this naïve, Old World village. When the cruise was over I returned to Provincetown to see why I liked it so much, and I have remained there ever since."

Wherever he was born, and however he arrived in the town he affectionately called "Ovince," Peter Hunt was irrefutably an influence in the area's growth as a summer center for the arts. A talented self-promoter, clever businessman, and inspired artist—in precisely that order—Hunt's name remains connected with Provincetown even now, 23 years after his death at the age of 71.

Current Prices for Peter Hunt Furnishings

Today, the majority of Peter Hunt originals rest in the hands of private collectors. Very few pieces ever come to the market, and values for those that do vary greatly according to size, complexity, and condition. In the last few years, prices for Peter Hunt furnishings have risen dramatically, in tandem with the

international folk-art boom. All indications point to continued price increases, though not necessarily at the same accelerated rate.

A large dresser that sold for \$1,500 two years ago may now command between \$4,000 and \$6,000. Peter Hunt washstands, desks, and small occasional tables range from about \$3,000 to \$5,000. As a rule, more intricate or off-beat pieces, such as cupboards outfitted with "curtains" or "valances" cut from plywood, will fetch higher prices because they are unique. "Marriages" of odd pieces, such as kerosene lamps turned into tables or picture frames transformed into serving trays, are often priced higher than their unaltered cousins, such as painted tables or trays.

Though Hunt inspired many imitators during the years he worked his magic, it was the artist's conviction that the best designs were personal ones carried out with a blithe spirit. "Your article, without doubt, will be a sad, drab, tired thing if you strive and struggle and fret while you are making it," he warned. "Don't worry about whether it will please your neighbor, although that is very nice, but be sure to please yourself." Satisfying his own enchantment with lighthearted motifs and primary colors, Hunt created works of simple and enduring joy. ■

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W H O

W A S

P E T E R

H U N T ?

... and why are

people paying so

much money for his

painted furniture

and knickknacks?

by Lynn Van Dine



LEGEND HAS IT that Peter Hunt first blew into Provincetown, Massachusetts, when a sudden storm interrupted a yachting excursion he was taking with F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. He strode down Commercial Street in a billowing black cape with two white Russian wolfhounds

- photographs by DOUG MINDELL

- furniture courtesy of Beta Walker Gallery

- Corbis/Bettmann

Opp. page: *Hunt at work, and details of his hand-painted furniture. Right: The words "anno 52 'ovince" on this chair indicate it was made in 1952 in Provincetown.*





Probably this piece was done by one of Hunt's apprentices.

and a dwarf scurrying in his wake. He suddenly stopped and announced, to nobody in particular, "It's perfectly wonderful. I must stay here."

A shameless self-promoter, canny businessman, and talented artist, Peter Hunt was the most prolific and publicized folk-art furniture decorator of the 1930s and 1940s and arguably the most colorful member of Provincetown's art colony, which included watercolorist John Whorf and playwright Eugene O'Neill.

He was also, some might say, an adept and creative liar.

The well-moneyed set who summured up and down the New England coast found his brightly colored pieces a welcome relief from the gray restraint of the Great Depression and World War II. Upper-class families delighted in Hunt's "peasant" decorations and paid top dollar for them.

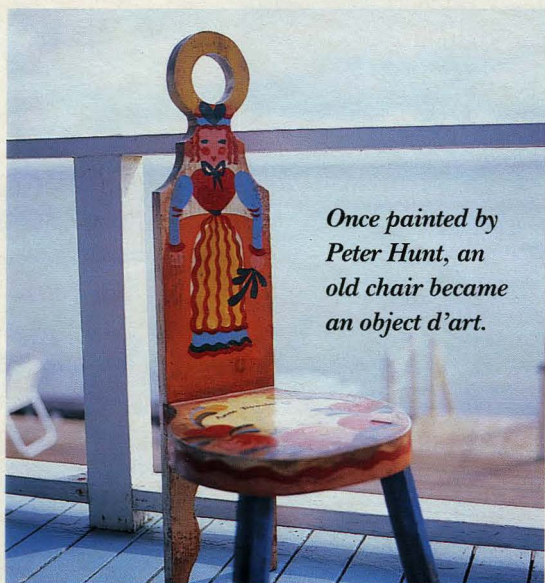
At the height of his popularity, the outrageous and utterly charming Hunt seemed to be in all the best New England summer houses and

A S I D E B O A R D *Hunt might have sold in*

the choice home-fashion magazines. His "Peasant Village" shops were the busiest in Provincetown. His furnishings and accent pieces held center stage in the best New York and Boston department stores and not just for a season or two, but for 20 years.

Hunt was an elegant-looking man with a slight build, a prominent forehead, and a thin mustache. His head and hands perpetually shook with mild tremors that worsened when he was excited, but the tremors vanished when he painted. His voice was light and quavered when he spoke. He sported an ascot tucked into a fisherman's shirt and pristine white boat shoes.

At soirees, salons, and saloons, Hunt gaily



Once painted by Peter Hunt, an old chair became an object d'art.



the 1940s for \$250 now goes for \$5,000.

Hunt's bright colors and whimsical images transformed the heavy, dark furniture styles of the Depression.



Big department stores vied for pieces like this 1952 love seat.

Barbara Townson Weller of Chatham, Massachusetts, who now owns her family's 18th-century summer home that Hunt decorated in 1935 when she was a teenager. "He was always fun and never mean. He

promoted the necessity of a blithe spirit and a glad heart in any creative endeavor. "The peasant never had any rules, and being an individualist, he always created something fine," he wrote. "I try to enter that spirit and do the pieces in that spirit."

His hand-painted angels, horses, and trompe l'oeil garnered commissions from the Drake Hotel in Chicago to Helena Rubenstein's terrace in Manhattan. "For a lot of the women here, Peter was a bauble, a charm on their charm bracelets that they liked to show off," recalls Barbara

HIS STROKE *had a distinctive boldness.*

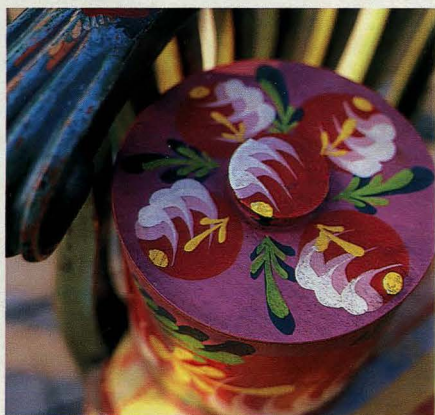
had the ability to bring everybody up. He made everybody more fun."

Hunt's bright colors and whimsical images twitted the massive, dark furnishings of pre-World War II America. He cobbled together flea-market furniture and pure junk — sardine tins became hors d'oeuvres dishes, table legs were reborn as candlesticks, and ruined spinets were remade as writing desks — to satisfy his clients' taste for the unusual and the colorful.

But almost as quickly as he rose to the pinnacle of the interiors business, he found himself a victim of his own success, widely imitated, socially passed, and cash poor. Within a few years of his death, it seemed all traces of Hunt and his peasant decorations had vanished, packed away in the attics of grand vacation manses. Until lately.

"There's no question that there's a renewed interest in Peter Hunt. In the last three or four years, his work has taken a big jump in interest and (continued on page 105)

Hunt made a fortune decorating ordinary items like this canister.



HOW TO TELL A REAL HUNT

(*And what to pay for it*)

THE MOST VALUABLE Peter Hunt pieces are from the 1930s and 1940s and are signed, especially inscriptions with names, dates, or places, says antiques dealer and appraiser Steve Tyng of East Orleans, Massachusetts, who specializes in Hunt works.

Hunt signed his pieces in a variety of ways. Often he would write "Peter Hunt" in childlike cursive lettering in or near an ornate border or on the back. Sometimes he would sign simply "anno Domini" and the year or "'Ovince," his nickname for Provincetown. Occasionally he would write in fun "Pierre le Chasseur," pidgin French for "Peter Hunt."

But often he didn't sign pieces, and these are the most difficult to tell from those done by his apprentices or imitators. "For me, it's hard to put into words, but there's a certain feel, a certain kind of stroke," says Tyng. He recommends having an appraiser or one of the remaining apprentices examine an unsigned piece before paying top dollar.

Nancy Whorf Kelly, who worked for Hunt for more than 20 years, offers the following clues for detecting a Hunt original:

- Hunt's designs were bold with strong colors. He never used a small brush, and his

works have no spidery qualities nor an excess of small details.

- He used bright colors — never a drop of black or dark brown paint — in styles reminiscent of Russian, Polish, Italian, and Pennsylvania Dutch folk art.

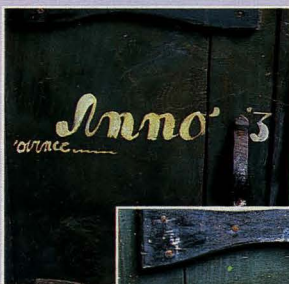
- Although his designs often had a looseness to them, they were not sloppy. His decorations were not symmetrical and not studied.

- Hunt often left large blobs of paint and dribbles, which he felt added character and kept to the folk-art style.

Cape Cod auctioneer Robert Eldred Jr. advises bidders to pay top prices only for signed pieces. Ethical antiques merchants and auctioneers will make a distinction between signed

pieces and "Hunt-style" works.

Prices can vary widely even on signed pieces, depending on the article, date, quality, and rarity of the item. Small medium-quality trays, for instance, can start between \$75 and \$125 and climb to \$200, depending on the age and design, say dealers. A larger piece, such as a writing desk or a small dresser, usually starts around \$275 to \$350 and can reach \$750 or more. A very large piece, such as a buffet or dining set, can start at \$1,500 and go much higher.



One of Hunt's distinctive touches was to date pieces with "anno Domini."

WHO WAS PETER HUNT?

(continued from page 62)

price," says Cape Cod auctioneer Robert Eldred Jr. "The demand is driving up the prices. A sideboard Hunt might have sold back in the 1940s or 1950s for \$250 now goes for \$5,000."

As interest in Hunt spreads, so do the stories. "There are quite a few people who still remember seeing Peter or watching him work," says antiques dealer and appraiser Steve Tyng of East Orleans, who specializes in Hunt furnishings. "He seemed to be everywhere for a while. He fascinated a lot of people."

Hunt was actually the child of a New Jersey tenement neighborhood who made good, or at least made good company. But he wove stories of royal ancestors or European frolics to attract the wealthy and well-connected. "Oh, he was as phony as they come," Nancy Whorf Kelly says affectionately. She is a Provincetown artist who worked for Hunt on and off for more than 20 years. "Whatever he said, he made up as he went along."

Depending on his audience, Hunt would claim he was of European birth, or descended from Russian royalty, or named Peter Lord Templeton, or a child of Manhattan. "It didn't matter, really, if he was telling the truth because he was so utterly engaging," Kelly says. "Peter Hunt wasn't even his real name."

* * *

THE ONE VERSION OF PETER HUNT'S LIFE that his clientele never heard was the real

WHO WAS PETER HUNT?

(continued)

one. He was born on April 4, 1896, in New Jersey as Frederick Lowe Schnitzler, according to the Provincetown Heritage Museum, which has a substantial collection of Hunt's work. During World War I, a German-sounding name could make work hard to find or keep, so his family changed the name to Hunt. Peter Hunt served as an ambulance driver in Europe during the war, which is where he said he first saw Italian, Spanish, and French folk art.

Soon after he returned from the service in 1919, Hunt moved to Provincetown, which he christened "'Ovince," an affected contraction created by dropping the "Pr" from the front and "town" from the end. He started an antiques business on Kiley Alley off Commercial Street, an enterprise that languished.

He moved his parents — known only as Ma and Pa Hunt — to Provincetown in the early 1920s. Soon after they settled there, Pa Hunt took up painting. Peter Hunt and his friend, art museum director and collector Hudson Walker, promoted Pa's work as folk art.

Hudson Walker's daughter, Provincetown gallery owner Berta Walker, grew up adoring Hunt and remembers how the three Walker girls were so taken with him that they adopted him, even giving him gifts on Father's Day. "He was so much fun. We just loved him," recalls Walker.

Pa Hunt's place in Provincetown's art colony, manufactured or not, gave Peter

Hunt some artistic cachet. To shore up his struggling antiques business, Hunt began decorating odds and ends to attract tourist dollars, using his father's folk-artist status to give his own work credibility. These one-of-a-kind, hand-painted household pieces caught the attention of society matrons hungry for something attention-grabbing for their summer houses or city apartments. Hunt's bright colors and considerable personal charm made him irresistible, and he was soon in demand for fat commissions.

In the mid-1930s, Hunt was carried into Cape, Boston, and New York society circles by Frances Brown Merkel, who summered in Harwich Port. She was a vivacious and wealthy social butterfly who spread his fame to all her well-to-do friends.

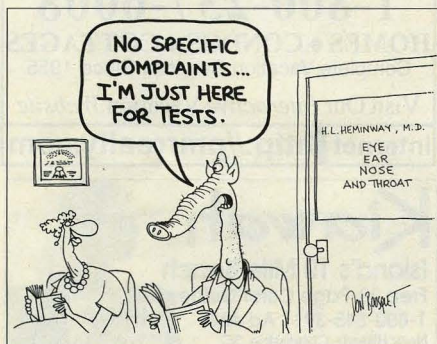
It was a lavish 1937 coming-out party for Merkel's daughter, Ann Brown Maclure, that captured the attention of posh retailers and sealed Hunt's reputation as a designer for the wealthy. Hunt decorated Boston's Somerset Ballroom as a working Austrian village, says Henry "Harry" Maclure, Ann's husband. "Annie's mother was so keen on Peter. They both worked like mad to play up the Austrian angle."

"It had a street with little shops you could go in with clerks all dressed up like peasants, and the music, and even a stork," Ann recalls. Boston society columnists crowned the coming-out party "the social triumph of the season, the biggest thing they'd seen in years," she says.

To keep up with his upper-crust commissions and a booming retail trade, Hunt expanded his place of business, swallowing up Kiley Alley and creating a warren of shops, studios, and apartments for his growing workforce. He dubbed it "Peasant Village."

"Oh, it was a lot of fun," says Wendy Hackett Everett of Provincetown, an apprentice at Peasant Village in the 1940s. "My mother was afraid working for Peter would prostitute my art. But I was 16 years old then. I didn't have any art yet."

Watercolorist John Whorf, one of the original art colony artists and father of Nancy Whorf Kelly and her sister Carol



Whorf Wescott, took quite a different view. "He told us we'd never have as great a job again. And he was right," says Wendy Everett. "Peter gave us a free hand with the pieces we did. And he insisted we have fun with it, enjoy it. In the summers we'd sit out in the courtyard and paint."

Although the furniture, accessories, and pottery painted by his apprentices were done in the Hunt style, only folk-art connoisseurs and his few surviving workers can tell if a piece was done by Hunt or by one of his students, says Kelly. "His stroke was very distinctive. He had a boldness. He never used a small brush, and his designs never had a spidery quality. He sometimes allowed little dribbles, because that's how peasants would do it in Europe."

One day Kelly, Wescott, and Everett discovered their boss wasn't exactly the man he said he was. "We found a little children's Bible among his things, inscribed to Freddie Schnitzler. That's when we realized Peter Hunt wasn't his real name," Kelly recalls.

"We were aware he made up stories about himself, even when we were girls," says Everett. "I don't think he was trying to make anybody believe them. He was just having fun."

And what fun he had. Hunt's stylings and furniture were in hot demand at Macy's, Bloomingdale's, and Gimbel's in New York. He branched into fabric designs and table settings. Hunt's business thrived through World War II, when he taught his techniques through paint pamphlets and magazine articles, as well as *Peter Hunt's Workbook* and *Peter Hunt's How-to-Do-It Book*.

By the mid-1950s, Hunt-style peasant works were everywhere. Pieces made by his apprentices and imitators flooded the home-decoration and souvenir markets. The value of his pieces went flat. "Peter said that one day he heard a woman in his Christmas shop complaining about the price of an ornament," says artist and restaurateur Walter Hyde of Brewster. "She said something like, 'They want \$2.50 [about \$12 in 1997 prices] for one ornament?' Peter said that's when he knew there was no more money to

be had in Provincetown."

In 1959 Hunt sold Peasant Village and relocated up-Cape to Orleans. There, in the hub of the business district on Route 6A, he opened a small collection of shops he called "Peacock Alley" in 1960.

Hunt's lifestyle remained high-flying, even as his means became earthbound. "He blew money in fine style," recalls Kelly, who continued to paint pieces for him in Provincetown and truck them down to his Orleans shop. The last time Kelly saw him, in April 1967, Hunt was decked out in evening attire. "My husband and I drove down some pieces I'd painted for him, and he was just on his way out the door, going out with some friends to a fancy dinner at Chillingsworth," she recalls. As Hunt reached into his pocket to pay her, Kelly told him to mail her a check.

"My husband thought I was crazy. We really needed the money then, and he said, 'Why did you tell him to send a check? Did you see him? He could die before he gets to it!' And that's just what happened. A few days later, I heard he died. Died in his sleep. That's a nice way to go, but I never got the check."

About a year after his funeral, Hunt's estate was auctioned off for \$40,000. That's a pittance compared to what it would be worth now, says auctioneer Eldred. At his summer Americana auction, a small, signed fall-front desk decorated by Hunt brought \$1,870. Even unsigned Hunt-style pieces were snapped up at hundreds of dollars apiece.

Antiques dealer and appraiser Tyng ascribes a certain irony to the current Hunt revival. "Now you see a lot of people buying these grand old summer homes on the Cape, and they're restoring them to their former beauty," says Tyng. "Part of that restoration effort includes decorating with Peter Hunt pieces. They capture the time so well, they're part of the Cape, they're colorful and attractive, and they're usually functional, too.

"I guess you could say those Peter Hunt pieces are finding their way back to the homes that first had them." □ □



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Opening Reception
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Image: Detail of Decorative Painting
by Peter Hunt on a Credenza from the
Collection of the Provincetown Heritage Museum

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Arts & Entertainment

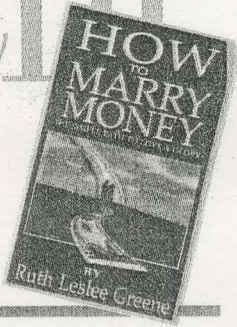
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Van Dine plays hide & seek with Peter Hunt

By Sue Harrison
 BANNER STAFF

It's taken seven years of research to produce Lynn Van Dine's "The Search for Peter Hunt" (The Local History Company), but fans and even those who have never heard of the enigmatic folk artist will agree the result is a splendid piece of writing and a fascinating tale of self-invention. Van Dine will hold a book signing from 3 to 5 p.m.

index in the back, real people are listed, fictional characters do not appear.

Hunt was born Frederick Schnitzer in Jersey City to a poor family in a rundown section of town. Ma, a long-suffering wife and mother struggled to make ends meet, while Pa dealt with his failures by spending more time in the local saloon than at home. Little Freddy was a teacher's pet, a gifted sketcher, a charmer and, by extension, a target for bullies.

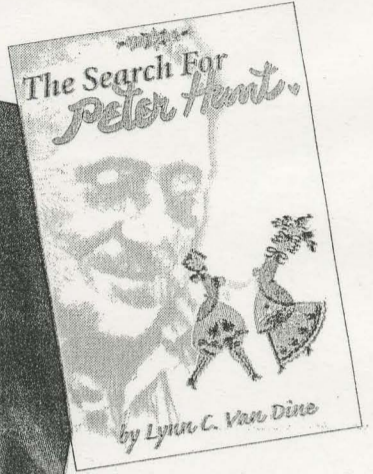


A sketch of Peter Hunt by Jack Amoroso.

anced tale with the best of all possible worlds contained within.



PHOTO GORDON T. WELLER



Author Lynn Van Dine has spent years researching the life of Peter Hunt.

artist John Whorf's daughters Carol and Nancy who have each gone on to become successful artists themselves. At one time he had so many summer apprentices that he had to find a way to house them. There was even a novel written, "Paintbox

on Saturday at Yellow Umbrella Bookstore, 501 Main St., Chatham.

The book won't be officially released until January but Van Dine has established a Peter Hunt website for information on him and on her book. Visit it at www.peasantvillage.com.

Truman Capote took credit for inventing what he called the historical novel and Van Dine has created a hybrid, a cross between a well-researched biography and a historical novel. In her book, the elusive Hunt comes to life along with many of the famous and infamous in New York, Paris and Provincetown. He was the man who took colorful peasant designs and converted them into highly demanded decorative chic. To be able to tell his story more fully, Van Dine has also invented a

After being rescued from a street bully by the artist Frederick Waugh who was visiting his old nursemaid in the neighborhood, Freddy found out that there are people in the world who make a living from art and his dream of escaping poverty via art was born.

Most of the book is dedicated to how Freddy Schnitzer became Peter Hunt (and at one time Peter Lord Templeton Hunt) and the darling of society matrons who clamored for him to design rooms in their homes. As a vehicle to bridge the gap between fact, fiction and extrapolation, Van Dine introduces short chapters where Hunt appears to the author as a ghost to comment on the book, on her research and on the fine line between reality and myth. He spins tales for her, attempting to sway the story to a happier shade of recollection, to mask some of the painful and more difficult times. She perseveres in keeping the truth in play and the end result is a delicately bal-

"He would absolutely love this, it's the ultimate reinvention," Van Dine says, by phone from her Michigan home, of her kindly fictionalized version of his life.

"He was clever and crafty and all about taking what he had and making it saleable."

"Don Quixote Owl" is one of Hunt's forays into the psychedelic realm.



In the book, Van Dine tells of Hunt's discovery of the delights of Greenwich Village, of the Armory Show that launched the new era of modern art, of the fun and excesses of pre-WWI America. Hunt learns quickly that one can change, chameleon-like, almost on a whim. As a new friend Baron Willy tells him, "You have to be willing to let everything, everyone else go. You have to become what you want ... You must be-

volunteers as an ambulance driver during WW I and is wounded. After the war he stays in France and studies peasant painting in Arras. Through his new arty friends, he begins to meet society types like Helena Rubenstein who became a life-long friend.

Hunt moves to Provincetown and sets up an antique business which transforms over the years into a folk art studio for everything from Christmas ornaments to full rooms of furniture.

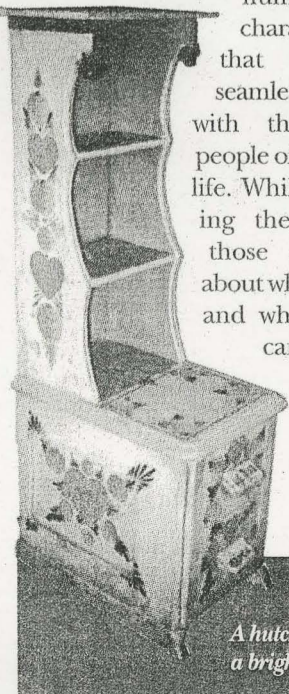
His peasant designs, a Hunt-originated mixture of colors, imagery and brushwork from all over Europe, made his career. Initially, the rich and famous flocked to him to get their homes decorated and then the big department stores started buying his pieces. When WW II rolled around his ability to transform cast off furnishings collided with Dupont's introduction of a new home craft paint line and a commercial marriage was formed. He wrote how-to books like "Transformagic" for the austere times and was embraced by the masses. That mass appeal eventually had an opposite effect on his success and he fell from favor and failed to get the big design jobs.

Throughout his years of high demand he employed apprentices like

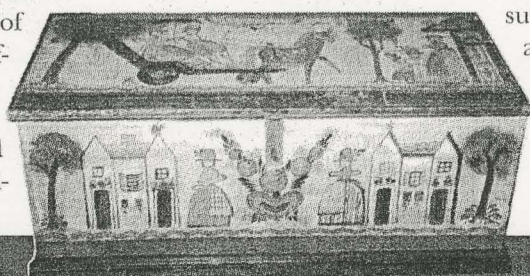
Summer," about a young girl spending a season as his apprentice. His antique shop grew to encompass several shop and workshop areas and living spaces, the whole known as Peasant Village. The colorful complex was located on Kiley Court which, for a while, was known as Peter Hunt Lane. He brought his parents to Provincetown and his father surprised everyone by taking up painting and gaining almost instant acclaim as the primitive painter Pa Hunt.

Throughout the book, names familiar to Provincetown residents crop up. The reader meets Bruce and Amy McKain, Ross Moffett, Mary Heaton Vorse, John Reed, Mary Hackett, Wendy (Hackett) Everett, Mabel Dodge, Eugene O'Neill, the Walkers (Hudson, Ione and daughter Berta), the Whorfs (John and daughters Nancy and Carol) and many more local luminaries. Van Dine shines at putting flesh on these characters. One can feel the energy of Bruce McKain, the dryness of O'Neill, the generosity of Hudson Walker.

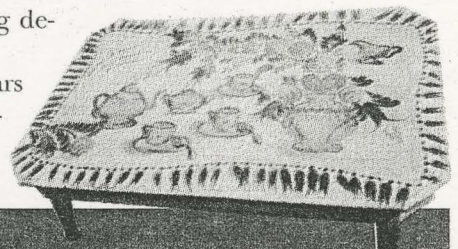
■ HUNT continued on page 37



A hutch decorated by Hunt created a bright spot in any home.



A chest painted by Hunt shows the peasant style he used.



A tea table decorated by Peter Hunt in the whimsical fashion he made popular.

■ **HUNT** continued from page 33

Hunt closed down his Provincetown shops and sold his property there in 1959, relocating to a complex he had purchased in Orleans in '52. He called his new enclave Peacock Alley and had shops up by the road and a small cottage in the rear by Town Cove.

Throughout the book, Van Dine walks carefully around the issue of Hunt's sexual identity. Though many believe he was gay, he himself claimed bisexuality for most of his life. Whether that was fact or just another fiction meant to make him more appealing to his society clientele is unclear, yet Von Dine lets his assertion of bisexuality stand.

"He gave himself a lot of room," she says. "He told several of his apprentices that he was bisexual. Eugene [O'Neill] said he was very homosexual but one of the good ones, meaning someone he could hang out with. He had a male companion near the end though he lived separately. I heard there was a woman that he kept in a flat in the Village and often stayed overnight but I couldn't nail it down.

"The trick in researching and tracking the truth down is that I wanted to give him space to have his story," Van Dine says.

Hunt died in his sleep in a comfortable but unglamorous pair of old blue pajamas. His papers are now at the Smithsonian and he would be happy to know that his decorated furniture is now fetching steep prices at auction.

"Peter seems so simple and straightforward and in some ways he was," Van Dine says of Hunt's direction in life. "His approach was, have fun. If you are not having fun, it's not worth doing. It seems simplistic but it's very sage advice. Measure what you are doing and if you are not enjoying it, maybe it's the wrong thing to be doing. It's the ultimate peasant attitude — in a good life, you have some fun." □

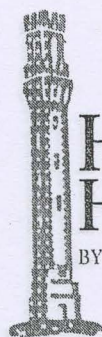
Peter Hunt, folk artist

On one of his winter trips to town, Peter Hunt decorated a chest as a gift for a young girl in the style of a Sicilian wine cart he had once owned. He painted the chest with scenes from her life. "She liked it, and I liked making it," recorded Hunt, "And that's how I began to paint things in my version of the peasants' manner."

In the early 1940s Peter Hunt established a workshop called Peter Hunt's Peasant Village in Provincetown. He employed as many as a dozen local people as apprentices to help him with his work. Hunt adapted the bold brushstrokes of folk designs to decorate and brighten junk-shop furniture finds. After the New York crowd discovered his painted furniture, it became a phenomenon.

Peter Hunt wrote, "People in shops heard about it all and it seemed very strange to them, so they came up to see it. Then the things I made were put in some shops. And when one of the clever heads of a huge department store wandered up here in a blizzard, I found I was in business. At least I suppose it's a business. A lot of people work with me now, but they all stay on their job here because they like doing it better than they would like doing anything else."

In an article written in 1990 for Country Living Magazine, Abby Ruoff writes, "An enigmatic personality, Peter Hunt became a celebrity who often invented his own biography. According to some renditions, he was christened Frederick Lowe Schnitzer in 1896 in New Jersey;



History Highlights

BY LAUREL GUADAZNO

other reports place his birth in Manhattan. When and why the artist changed his name, and how he came to settle in a fishing village at the northern tip of Cape Cod, are mysteries. One theatrical account suggests that, in the early 1920s, Hunt arrived in Provincetown wearing a long black cape, with two Afghan hounds in tow. Hunt's own reminiscence suggests that in 1921, on a cruise to Maine, 'we put into Provincetown in a storm. I was utterly charmed by this naïve, Old World village. When the cruise was over I returned to Provincetown to see why I like it so much, and I have remained there ever since.' Wherever he was born, and however he arrived in the town he affectionately called 'Ovince,' Peter Hunt was irrefutably an influence in the area's growth as a summer center for the arts. A talented self-promoter, clever businessman, and inspired artist — in precisely that order — Hunt's name remains connected with Provincetown even now ..."

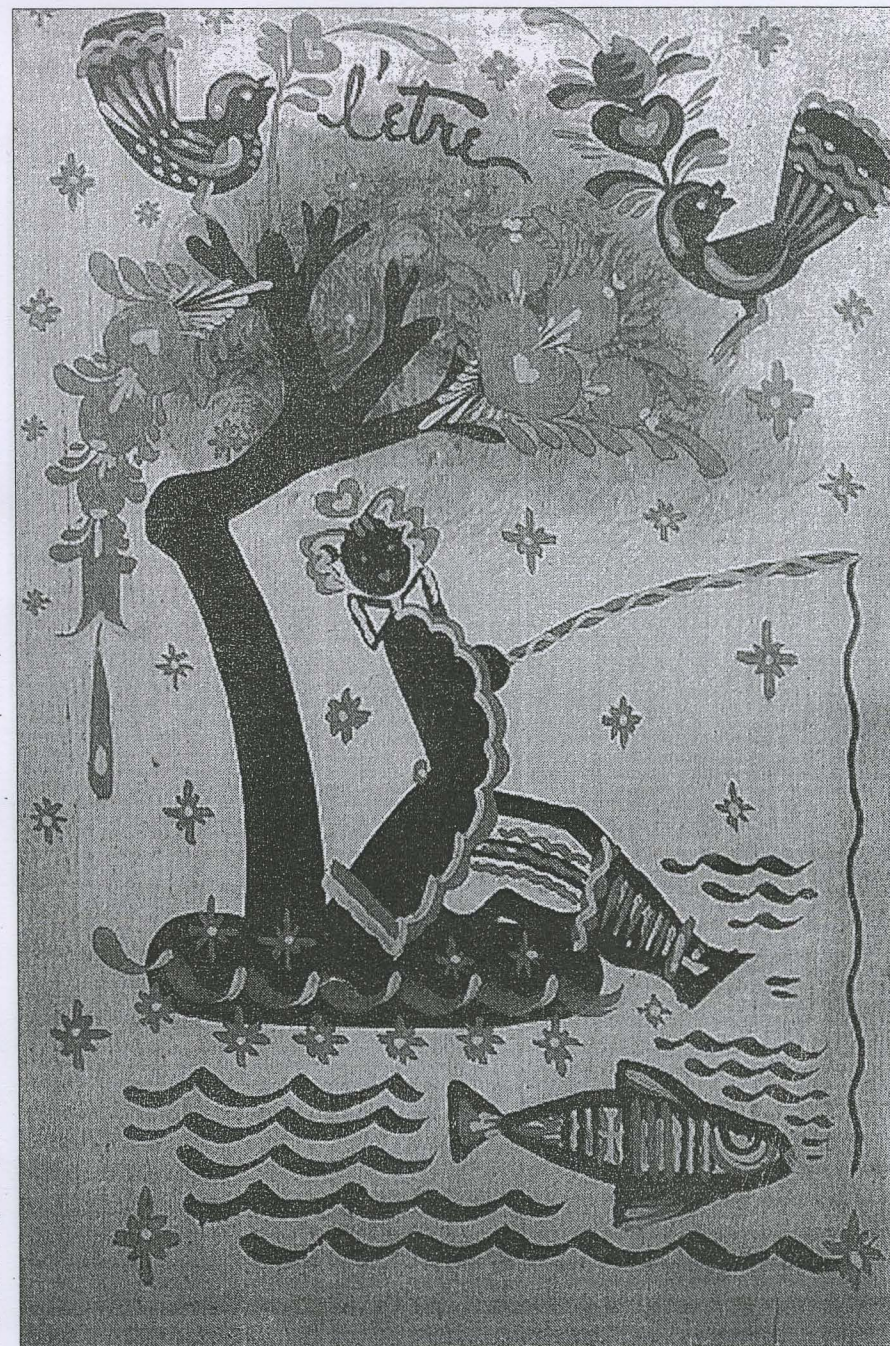
Some local residents say that Peter Hunt left Provincetown when one day in the 1950s a man came into his shop, picked up a Christmas ornament that

Peter Hunt had made, and exclaimed in horror at the price of \$2.50 marked on the ornament. Peter said he knew then that people with money were no longer coming to Provincetown, and it was time to close up shop. He moved to Orleans and opened a shop there in Peacock Alley.

Today with the renewed interest in "country" decorating, painted furniture is once again being featured in fashionable department stores.

"To reconstruct your old furniture and decorate it in a peasant manner should be a lot of fun for you. In fact a 'blithe spirit' — as I found out I had from reading somebody's editorial about my things — is an important part of your equipment. I think that peasant designs are the gayest and happiest form of decoration that exists. They

must be created in that frame of mind. If at the very beginning you realize you aren't going to have a grand time doing it, just stop right there, because as sure as death the result will be a tired, dreary affair," wrote Peter Hunt in the introduction to "Pe-



Detail of decoration painted by Peter Hunt on a piece of furniture from the collection of the Provincetown Heritage Museum.

ter Hunt's Workbook," published in 1945.

In 1952, Prentice-Hall published Peter Hunt's "How to Do It Book," and an illustrated volume of recipes, "Peter Hunt's Cape Cod Cookbook," was pub-

lished in 1954.

[Laurel Guadagno is visitor services manager for the Pilgrim Monument & Provincetown Museum. She also writes and narrates "History Highlights," heard regularly on WOMR, 92.1 FM.]