

LIFE



TRANSOCEANIC TRANSPORT

AUGUST 23, 1937

10 CENTS

PROVINCETOWN HAS A THEATRE TRADITION *(continued)*

The most famous of all summer theatres began in an old fishhouse on the wharf (left). A group of artists summering in Provincetown, Mass. met at the home of the late great Communist John Reed, decided to write and give their own plays. Among them were Novelist Susan Glasspell, Artist Robert Edmond Jones, Story Writer Wilbur Daniel Steele. Novelist Mary Heaton

Vorse lent them her wharf fishhouse. A lanky Irish lad named Eugene O'Neill gave them some one-act plays. Eventually they moved to a stable in New York's McDougal St. Thus started the career of America's greatest playwright and the theatre which contributed most to authentic U.S. stage literature. Young actors carry on the tradition in a rebuilt Wharf Theatre at Provincetown.



LOW TIDE AT PROVINCETOWN THEATRE WHARF



A theatre school for novices attracts youngsters to Provincetown's Wharf Theatre. They pay \$125 tuition for an eight-weeks course, get parts in two free student productions. They are here studying radio-broadcasting technique under Jean Paul King, N. B. C. announcer.



Scene construction is a part of every Wharf Theatre apprentice's course. On the stage they sew, paint, nail together a set for the next Provincetown play. Through the proscenium arch you can see the simple barnlike structure of the theatre's seating space beyond.



STUDENT ACTORS AT PROVINCETOWN GO SUN BATHING ON CAPE COD SAND BETWEEN REHEARSALS

DENNIS PLAYHOUSE WAS A CAPE COD CHURCH

At Dennis, on Cape Cod, there stood for many years a strange dilapidated old building. At various stages of its history it had been a church, a school, a slaughterhouse, a stable and a garage. In 1927, Raymond Moore, a young painter from Provincetown, bought it for \$400 and converted it into what is today the popular and successful Cape Playhouse. It now represents a total in-

vestment of \$80,000. Its Gothic windows and natural-wood interior are reminders of its pious Cape Cod heritage; but on its stage have trod a good score of America's leading actors. They include Ina Claire, Ruth Gordon, Judith Anderson, Grace George, Laura Hope Crews, Bette Davis and Robert Montgomery. Doris Nolan (*Top of the Town*) was this year's top attraction.

(continued)

THE SUMMER THEATRE TURNS TO STOCK

Though summer theatres in the U. S. are more than a quarter-century old, not till 1930 did they really come to life. A depression-struck Broadway then discovered in these converted barns, schoolhouses and churches a cheap testing laboratory for untried plays. Actors could be got for room and board, electricians without benefit of union pay, scenic artists for the love of it. So many playhouses blossomed in the woods that by 1934 *Variety*, the showman's bible, listed 105 bona fide "straw-hat" theatres prepared to present 135 new plays. Script and talent scouts swarmed out from Manhattan to make discoveries.

Few were made. Some new personalities appeared on these makeshift stages, but not many. Some summer plays reached Broadway, but very few. Good summer plays were often ruined by hasty production. As a laboratory, summer theatres lost caste. Most of them lost money. This year finds last year's number reduced by 40%, the relatively small number of tryouts cut by a third.

The 40-odd rural showhouses that remain have changed their tack. They are now putting themselves on a firmer financial, if less artistic, basis. For the unknown quantity of new plays they are substituting the pulling power of such trusted Broadway successes as *Tonight at 8:30*, *Lysistrata*, *The Front Page* and *The Petrified Forest*. Instead of new faces, they rely on Broadway and Hollywood names. New talent consists largely of Hollywood fledglings, farmed out by the movie companies to acquire technique for potential stardom. Talent scouts still roam the outlying barns, but the pickings are scarce. Gradually the summer theatre is being geared to replace the vanished U. S. stock company of pre-War days.



Summer-theatre audiences vary according to their communities. Some, like those at the old Wharf Theatre, Provincetown, are frankly informal, even a bit Bohemian (top picture). They come in slacks and beach wear and like the theatre's experiments. At the Cape Playhouse, Dennis, theatre-goers are mainly good upper-middle-class "summer folk," with a sprinkling of wealth from "south of Hyannis" (middle picture). They dress in comfortable but conventional summer togs, react with comfort and ease to smart Broadway comedies. The Westchester Playhouse in Mt. Kisco is filled with intelligent New York commuters (bottom picture) who know good plays. Audiences at Newport are social register-ite (left). Evening dress is virtually obligatory. Response is cool, reserved, very well-bred.

AT NEWPORT



A new comedy, *Stork on Skis*, is tried at the Wharf Theatre, Provincetown, with Leona Powers, an accomplished trouper. With rewriting and a new title, it may reach Broadway.