

# FORD TIMES

august 1956



## *The Cape-Enders of*

# PROVINCETOWN

by Edward Weeks . . . paintings by John Whorf

AGE COUNTS for a good deal on Cape Cod, and Provincetown, on the extreme seaward tip, is the oldest port of call. That is where the Pilgrims first landed, not on the much-publicized Rock at Plymouth. On November 11, 1620, the *Mayflower* dropped anchor in this safe, natural harbor and here on the curve of the crescent Miles Standish landed and made the first explorations for a settlement. The Monument, a tall stone tower dedicated by President Taft, acknowledges Provincetown's primacy—and accounts for no little envy in other parts of the Cape.

There are other causes of neighborly envy. Provincetown was the first to capitalize on its artists and playwrights, long before Orleans or Dennis realized that there was gold in those hills. The Provincetown Players, to whom Eugene O'Neill submitted his "Bound East for Cardiff" in the summer of 1915, were really the beginning of summer theater. Finally, Provincetown was the first village unashamedly to turn itself inside out for the summer trade; and this unreticence which now prevails all along the coast was both criticized and envied.

Plan to visit Provincetown in the first half of the week when the traffic along the beautiful new Mid-Cape Highway is so much less than on the weekends. You will know that you are approaching the promised land when, as you pass through Orleans, you see a sign reading "First Encounter Beach." This



*Portuguese children on the beach*

directs you to the spot where the Pilgrims and the Indians first let fly at each other. No one on either side was hit; the Indians simply faded away into the woods, the white men collected their souvenirs—arrows tipped with flint and whale-bone—and the fray was over. Incidentally, while you are in Orleans make note of one other guidepost, the Goose Hummock Shop on U. S. Route 6. If you are interested in fishing, either boat or surf-casting, here you will learn where the striped bass and blues are feeding and what lures to use.

The fun of visiting an old place is to uncover for yourself the various layers of the town. The top layer of Provincetown and the most obvious one is the tourist town; the motels and overnight cabins stretch along the beach all the way north to Truro, and on Commercial Street, whose name goes back to the golden age of the fishing fleet, the restaurants and gift shops are as multiple as they are in the *Vieux Carré* in New Orleans.

*Back street gardens on a foggy morning→*

Provincetown's second layer is composed of the artists and writers who have made this their summer workshop for going on five decades. The painters—men like Charles W. Hawthorne, Richard Miller and George Elmer Browne—were drawn there by the beauty of the harbor and the wharfs, by the sunlit clarity of the air and by the mysteriousness of the great dunes and the dwarf forests. They established schools of painting, which continue to this day, and what is surely the most famous bohemian club on Cape Cod, "The Beachcombers."

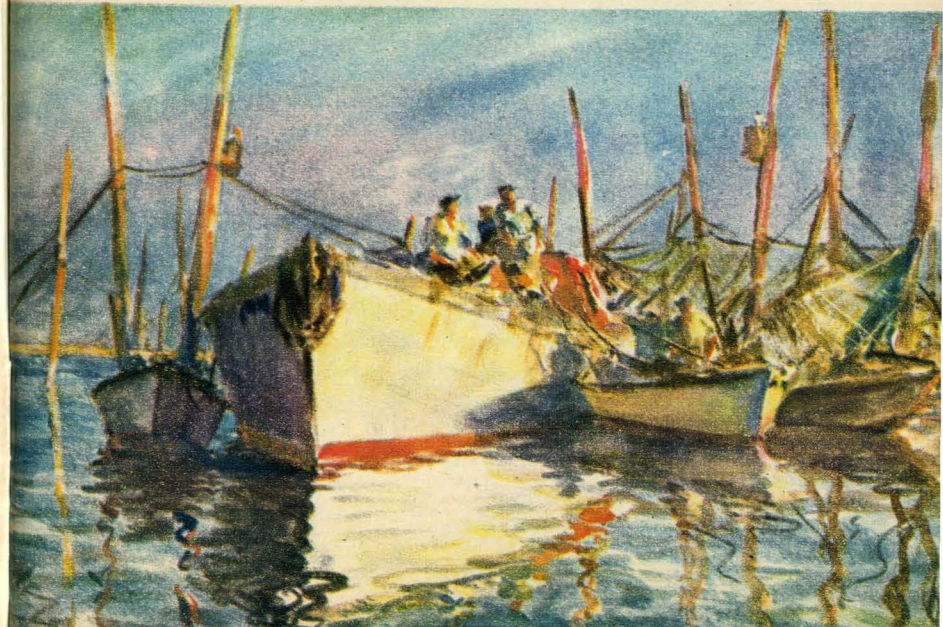
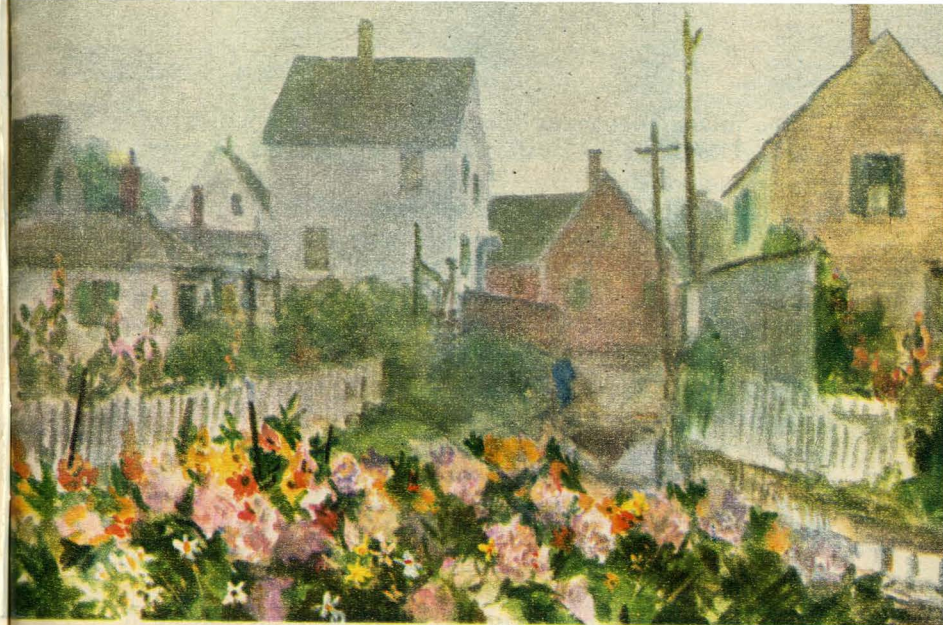
The fundamental or hidden layer of Provincetown is the community of the Cape-Enders, Yankee and Portuguese, who live here the year 'round and who have that tenacious pride of place which is characteristic of any Cape Codder.

The 1850's were the glory years for Provincetown as a sea-port. The fleet numbered close to seven hundred ships, fifty-six of them whalers; windmills spaced along the shore pumped the salt water into drying vats whence came the salt to cure the fish; and docks, more than fifty of them, reached out for the home-coming schooners.

The grandfather of Dr. Vannevar Bush, the dean of American scientists, was a Provincetown whaler who did things the right way. When the time came for him to retire from the sea he became a ship's chandler, built a comfortable white house on Commercial Street, and planted the elms which still shade its emerald turf. At the foot of the lawn was the long wharf from which his ships were serviced and at the end of which he and his family would sit of a summer's evening singing and enjoying the moonlight. I am indebted to Miss Edith Bush, his granddaughter, for this glimpse of old Provincetown.

The white, snug house with its open fires, the lawn leading down to the dock, the dock to the ships, and the ships to the South Seas—a pleasant picture and a good life. From the family wharf, Miss Bush reminded me, her father when a boy used to catch lobsters and then peddle them on a little cart through the streets, "5c" chalked on the small ones and "10c" on the large.

*Trap fishermen in the last light of day→*



*On the Cape-end dunes→*

The fishing fleet today is only a fraction of what it once was and the boats are smaller, but with their high prows and sturdy motors they bring in a profitable catch from the treacherous Georges Banks, a shoal eighty miles off shore. The editor of the Provincetown *Journal*, looking out over the harbor a century ago, could write: "The harbor looked splendid Sunday night, so thickly studded with vessels' lights. No city is as brilliant at night as this display." And today the harbor in its sandy crescent is still the beauty spot whether at dawn when the fishermen go out to the weirs or at sunset with the gulls screaming and dipping in the wake of the homecoming ships.

You come to Provincetown for the seafood; for the lobster at Pablo's, for the scallops and bluefish at Wong's, and for a great and noble clam chowder at the Provincetown Inn. You come, too, for the local arts which have a distinctive quality quite their own. And you come to Provincetown as you come to any headland with the wish to explore the great beaches in privacy. It is only a short drive to the Highland Light in Truro whose height and vast sweep are breathtaking: these are untamed seas in which more than twelve hundred ships have foundered in the past century. Or a beach buggy will drive you from Provincetown out to Race Point or to the Coast Guard Station at Wood End setting you down for a good walk through the great dunes, in and out of the hidden forests of pine and beech, or along the shell-strewn flats at low tide.

These are some of the finest jumping-off places on the Atlantic Coast. I say this not with suicidal intent but remembering rather the story of the little old lady who was aboard the first train which ever chugged into Provincetown the afternoon of July 22, 1871. Again and again she requested the conductor to be *sure* to tell her when the train reached Provincetown. Finally, as they neared the station, she asked for the last time: "Are you sure that the train will stop at Provincetown?"

"Lady," he answered with dry exasperation, "if it doesn't there will be a dem big splash!" ■

*Winter along the shore→*

