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This New England

photography by Bohdan Hrynewych
text by Edie Clark

Provincetown in November

Way out at the end of the Cape's long reach into the Atlantic, a fishing fleet of only forty boats pulls flounder, cod, and haddock into the Provincetown docks, while artists and tourists bring the town a prosperity that the fish never could. A tight cluster of commercial and creative activity cupped in a wilderness of sand dunes, Provincetown was once the most heavily populated town on Cape Cod and ranked along with New Bedford and Nantucket as a busy whaling port.

The town's population today, estimated to be about 4,000 year-round residents, may be close to the 4,555 counted up in the 1890 census, but the composition is radically different. After World War II, Provincetown's ocean-enforced isolation was broken by a trickle of artists who made their pilgrimage from Boston and New York City in response to the coy, beckoning fingertip of Provincetown. They were attracted by its curiously beautiful light, indulgent climate, and a tolerance for eccentricities that was rare elsewhere in New England. A word-of-mouth reputation gradually seduced artists and would-be artists in numbers that eventually well outnumbered the fishermen, many of whose families had emigrated there from Portugal aboard whaling vessels in the late 19th century.

Residents, whether of Portuguese descent or artistic persuasion, tend to wax sentimental about their town: it's the most cosmopolitan and sophisticated town on Cape Cod, they concur. There's always a diversion of one kind or another, and the weather is great: the Gulf Stream effectively bumps their calendar ahead by a month, making summers cooler and winters warmer; tomatoes can often stay on the vine through the first week in November. Unlike other seaside towns, where winters loom bleak and long, Provincetown glitters even through the gray curtain of February and many claim to prefer it in the off-season. Town clerk Paul Noonan responds emphatically when asked how he likes wintering over: "I've never been bored even for five *seconds* in Provincetown in the winter."

The clatter of the honky-tonk does die down in the winter, but the town's infectious spirit remains. Like the sand hills that curl around it, pushed this way and that at the whim of the wind and the restless Atlantic, Provincetown is a place of change, a place where city folk bring their frenzied lives along with them, offering up offbeat attitudes like gifts that seep into the pastiche of a colorful fishing village. □ □

*The profile of the town is reflected at low tide by the harbor,
which is completely landlocked from the sea.*





This New England (continued)



Top center and above: *The town rescue squad, an active and important service to the town for the past 27 years, has a monthly get-together at Cookie's restaurant. Owner and cook, town fire chief Wilbur Cook, poses with his wife Ruth in their kitchen.*

Top left: *Selectmen moderate a town meeting. On the agenda were issues concerning a new town wharf, raising money for town Christmas tree lights, noise at a local pub.*

Far left: *Dwayne Steele, whose ancestors came to Provincetown from the Azores in 1879, says of his town: "I worked outside for many years but I always wanted to come back. It's very hard to leave this town. Everyone knows everyone else. When I was painting my house, I couldn't get it done. Everyone wanted to stop and talk."*

Left: *Mary Jo Avellar, one of the town's selectmen, sums up her town this way: "This is no sleepy little town."*





This New England (continued)



Left: Drifting sand blows across the highway like new-fallen snow. Sand was once taken by sea captains to use as sand ballast on their whaling ships. Here, Ed McCann helps clear Route 6 of sand that he'll use in construction work.

Above: Beach cabins along Route 6A offer symmetry to an otherwise checkered town.

Top: Jimmy Marconi presides over a sidewalk sale held outside the Café Blasé, where he is the chef.



Above: The Coast Guard Station at Race Point — which is not really a part of Provincetown. The town is only three miles long; the miles of dunes and seashore outside these limits have been part of the Cape Cod National Seashore since 1961.

This New England (continued)

Far right: Roller skating against a backdrop of buildings that stand much the same as they did at the turn of the century, save for some occasionally tacky face-lifts.

Right: A colorful kite display vies for attention amid the bustle of Commercial Street.



