



Provincetown, Massachusetts History

Provincetown Theater Milestones

Year	Event
1620	Pilgrims make their debut in November.
1781	The Pilgrim House built; it will become a hotel in 1810 and in the 20th Century its Madeira Room will be the venue for a rich variety of cabaret presentations.
1798	The Atlantic House built; it will serve as a tavern, stage coach stop and sometime courthouse; in the 20th Century it will become a haunt of Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, Gore Vidal and a host of other literary and theatrical figures.
1836	The Central House Hotel built; later, as the Crown & Anchor it, like the Pilgrim House, will become a lively cabaret venue.
1850's	Henry David Thoreau visits Provincetown on his walking tours of the Cape, staying twice at the Pilgrim House. In his book "Cape Cod," referring to our harbor filled with fishing boats under sail, he refers to it as a "City of Canvas." Leona Rust Egan, in her book "Provincetown As A Stage", observes that this could as well refer to Provincetown in its age as an artist colony and as a theater venue with its canvas backdrops.
Later 1800's	Provincetown's increasingly Portuguese fishing community thrives. Mary Heaton Vorse, in <i>Time and the Town</i> , will write "People in Provincetown have always danced and sung. The Portuguese came early and brought with them their Latin gaiety and gusto for living." This exuberance will help create an hospitable climate for the artists, authors and theater folk who will soon make their appearance.
1898	The "Portland Gale" in November devastates the harbor and an already declining fishing industry; as a by-product it will result in cheap rooms for rent and space on nearly derelict piers that can be turned into artist's studios and theater stages.
1899	Painter Charles Webster Hawthorne founds his Cape Cod School of Art here, his students flock to Provincetown and several, starting with Ross Moffett, will found art schools themselves. The writers and theater folk will soon follow.
1907	Mary Heaton Vorse, fiction writer, labor reporter and liberal crusader arrives, falls in love with the Town and purchases the Captain Kibbe Cook House at 466 Commercial Street. She begins to coax her friends among the bohemian and often politically radical crowd of New York's Greenwich

	<p>Village to join her here in summers.</p> <p>This is also the year of Provincetown's Grand Banks fishing schooner Rose Dorothea winning the coveted Lipton Cup (now displayed in the Provincetown Public Library) and the laying of the cornerstone of the Provincetown Pilgrim Monument by President Theodore Roosevelt.</p>
1911	Playwright and short story writer Susan Glaspell spends her first summer in Provincetown.
1913	George Cram ("Jig") Cook arrives for the first time, together with Susan Glaspell, whom he has just married.
1914	<p>New York socialite Mabel Dodge arrives in company with John S. "Jack" Reed.</p> <p>Jack Reed, described as "the Village's Golden Boy," will be active in the founding of the Provincetown Players, will conduct affairs with Mabel Dodge and journalist Louise Bryant, will go off as a journalist to cover the Bolshevik revolution and will be immortalized in Warren Beatty's film <i>Reds</i>.</p> <p>Dodge and Reed stay in town and camp out in a silken tent in the dunes. Mabel spots the abandoned life-saving station at Peaked Hill Bars and arranges for its renovation and decoration to suit her cosmopolitan taste. In 1915, she will return with painter Maurice Sterne, having broken up with Reed.</p> <p>The outbreak of war in Europe sends a tide of the international bohemian set to America, to Greenwich Village and, many of them - in summer, to the tolerant and lively community of Provincetown.</p>
1915	<p>Summer residents and theater enthusiasts Neith Boyce and Hutchins Hapgood organize friends to perform original plays at their home in the East End. First they perform Boyce's one act "Constancy," a spoof of the romance between Mabel Dodge and Jack Reed, on the veranda overlooking the harbor; the actors then move to the living room, and the audience to the veranda, for a performance of "Suppressed Desires," by Susan Glaspell and Jig Cook.</p> <p>All have grown bored by the state of theater in the U.S., consisting largely of vaudeville, melodrama and farce, and are inspired by the new works of Norway's Ibsen, Sweden's Strindberg, England's Wilde and Shaw, and Ireland's John Millington Synge.</p> <p>Mary Heaton Vorse O'Brien (she had remarried, to Joe O'Brien, in 1913) acquires Lewis Wharf, a rickety old pier with a delapidated fish house at the end of its 100 foot length, in the East End, at approximately 571 Commercial Street. It becomes the original "theater-on-the-wharf," and the first performances are offered in August.</p>

1916	Described as "that remarkable summer," it sees the arrival of a 27 year old untried playwright, Eugene Gladstone O'Neill. His one-act play "Bound East for Cardiff" gets a reading in the Glaspell parlor, impresses all with its raw realism and is given a production on Lewis Wharf on the night of July 28. Susan Glaspell would later describe the event this way: "The sea has been good to Eugene O'Neill. It was there for his opening. There was a fog, just as the script demanded, fog bell in the harbor. The tide was in, and it washed under us and around, spraying through the holes in the floor, giving us the rhythm and the flavor of the sea while the big dying sailor talked to his friend Dris of the life he had always wanted deep in the land, where you'd never see a ship or smell the sea." The career of arguably the greatest American dramatist is thus launched, here in Provincetown Harbor.
1916	After the successful summer season on Lewis Wharf, Jig Cook and many of the others officially found the "Provincetown Players" on September 5th. Participants, besides Eugene O'Neill, include Susan Glaspell, Neith Boyce and "Hutch" Hapgood, Jack Reed, Louise Bryant, Wilbur Daniel Steele, and Harry Kemp (afterward known as Provincetown's "Poet of the Dunes"). Provincetown Players relocate to New York in October to a theater on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village. They produce their first successful and innovative season and will continue until 1922. Many continue to return to Provincetown in summers
1917	America enters World War I. Eugene O'Neill is spotted in the dunes and is arrested on suspicion of being a German spy communicating with enemy U-boats. In fact, he was toting his typewriter. The episode will inspire his one-act play "In the Zone."
1918	Eugene O'Neill, who continues to summer in Provincetown, marries Agnes Boulton. (Jack Reed having long since decamped to Russia with Louise Bryant, written "Ten Days That Shook The World," died in the midst of the civil war in Russia and been buried beside the wall of the Kremlin - the only Harvard man so honored). Eugene and Agnes move into the Peaked Hill Bars former life saving station which had been decorated by Mabel Dodge.
1919	Silent film version of O'Neill's "Anna Christie" premieres. O'Neill views it at the Provincetown Theater, a movie house destroyed in the "Whalers Wharf fire" in February, 1998. A re-make in 1930 will feature Greta Garbo in her first talking role, as Anna, and her unforgettable first line is "Gimme a whiskey, ginger ale on the side, and don't be stingy, baby." The final scene is set in Provincetown Harbor.
1920	O'Neill wins his first Pulitzer Prize for "Beyond the Horizon." He will go on to win three more Pulitzers and to become the only American dramatist to win a Nobel Prize for Literature. O'Neill has a spat with prim Provincetown Librarian Abbie Putnam, who has never approved of him. In his play "Desire Under the Elms," the character of the adultress and child murderer will be named Abbie Putnam.
1922	Lewis Wharf collapses in a winter storm.
1923	The Barnstormers Theater revives the tradition of the Provincetown Players, in an old barn on Bradford Street in the West End; they stage the premiere of O'Neill's S.S. Glencairn cycle, consisting of "Bound East for Cardiff," "Moon of the Carribees," "The Long Voyage Home," and "In the Zone."

1924	<p>A rift having developed among the Barnstormers between a conservative faction and an experimental faction, the conservatives clean out the barn, by night, and establish themselves as the Wharf Theater on a pier where the West End Racing Club is now located.</p> <p>Eugene O'Neill's last summer in Provincetown. Before moving to Peaked Hill Bars he had lived variously at the Snow Boathouse and the John Francis Apartments in the East End and at the Atlantic House, all the while turning out his early one act plays and honing his skills as a dramatist.</p> <p>"Jig" Cook dies in Greece, where he had hoped to restore the theater at Delphi; Susan Glaspell will tell of his life in her book "To the Temple."</p> <p>Bette Davis makes her first summer visit to Provincetown.</p>
1931	The former O'Neill home at Peaked Hill Bars is claimed by the sea in a winter storm.
1939	Sinclair Lewis, novelist and Nobel Prize winner, works at the West End Wharf Theater as an actor, director and playwright.
1940	<p>West End Wharf Theater destroyed in a winter storm.</p> <p>Tennessee Williams spends his first of several summers, staying variously at Captain Jack's Wharf, at a shack in the woods in the far West End, and at a cottage (dubbed "Rancho Sancho," in honor of his current love) at Beach Point, where in 1946 he will invite the young Marlon Brando to stay and read the part of Stanley Kowalski in his new play "A Streetcar Named Desire."</p> <p>The pier at the foot of Gosnold Street, in the center of Town, is first used for productions; Boston troupe presents O'Neill's "Great God Brown" and Susan Glaspell's "Inheritors."</p>
1942	Mary Heaton Vorse completes her book "Time and the Town," which chronicles theatrical and community life in Provincetown from her arrival in 1907 until America's entry into World War II.
1946	The Boston troupe from 1940 returns to establish Provincetown Playhouse-on-the-Wharf at the Town landing at the foot of Gosnold Street, including in its first season Susan Glaspell's Pulitzer Prize winning "Allison's House." The Playhouse will have a distinguished history under the directorship of Catherine Huntington, founder of the New England Repertory Theater, presenting works of O'Neill, including "The Emperor Jones" starring Paul Robeson, Tennessee Williams, George Bernard Shaw and Edward Albee among many others.
1950's	Provincetown's golden age of cabaret begins. The Pilgrim House's Medeira Room, The Atlantic House, the Crown & Anchor and other venues will present an array of talent through the decades, including Hildegarde, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Eartha Kitt, Paul Lynde, Divine, Jim Bailey, Lynn Carter, Arthur Blake, Wayland Flowers (plus "Madame" and "Jiffy"), Jimmy James, Tiffany Jones, Craig Russell, Nina Simone, Julie Wilson, and Lily Tomlin.
1953	Eugene O'Neill dies in Boston, after a long and distinguished career which was launched in Provincetown and was crowned by the posthumous production of his epic "Long Day's Journey

	Into Night."
1963	The Provincetown Theater Company (PTC) is founded as a community theater. It will have a distinguished history, utilizing a variety of venues.
1966	Mary Heaton Vorse dies at 92.
1969	Richard Gere makes his debut at the Theater on the Wharf in Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead." Catherine Huntington makes her last stage appearance in Tennessee William's "Camino Real."
1977	The Provincetown Playhouse-on-the-Wharf falls victim to arson; all that remains is the ticket office on the beach, now the Julie Heller Gallery. Tennessee Williams writes "hundreds of theater people have lost their roots."
1987	Provincetown resident Norman Mailer publishes "Tough Guys Don't Dance," a kinky take on life here; it will be made into a film starring Ryan O'Neal and Isabella Rossellini. Anthony Jackman produces the first "Close to Home" AIDS benefit at the Provincetown Inn, bringing summer entertainers back here in the off-season for the enjoyment of our year-rounders.
1994	Marj Conn founds the Provincetown Fringe Festival, with an emphasis on women in the theater. The Provincetown Repertory Theater (the REP) is founded as a professional equity company; like PTC it will utilize a variety of venues.
1998	Provincetown Interantional Film Festival debuts; John Waters is a guiding spirit.
1999	Jay Critchley inaugurates his "Theater in the Ground" with an initial venue of a disused septic facility in his yard.
2003	The appearence of "Naked Boys Singing" at the Crown & Anchor raises eyebrows and leads to some soul-searching regarding the relevant Town by-laws. In the end, a tolerant attitude prevails.
2004	The new Provincetown Theater facility, created under the auspices of the Provincetown Theater Foundation, opens on Bradford Street in the East End.
2005	The Sixth International Conference of the Eugene O'Neill Society is held in Provincetown, in conjunction with the first conference of the Susan Glaspell Society. Shakesphere on the Cape has its debut season, presenting "Twelth Night" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream."
2006	The PTC and the REP merge to form the New Provincetown Players.

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