

'I Remain Faithful to My Favorite Spot, Provincetown'

(George L. Moses, who regularly conducts this column, is on vacation. While he's away it will be written by a number of guest columnists.)

By DR. FRANCIS H. HORN

Every true Cape Codder has his favorite part of this unique land to which he swears allegiance. He may enjoy other parts of the Cape and even visit them occasionally. But he remains faithful to his favorite spot, be it on the Upper Cape or the Lower Cape, on the Back Side or the Bay Side, or indeed on some pond in the Mid-Cape area.

My spot is Provincetown. I love it with a warmth I feel for no other spot on this earth. The result is that I surround my life with mementos of Provincetown.

For most of the year, as soon as I open my eyes in the morning,

they rest on a picture of the Provincetown waterfront painted by Chaim Cross. As I swing my feet out of bed, I gaze at a picture of Commercial St. painted by George Yater, showing the shop of "Jason, My Barber" (which he is) and the old Methodist Church, now the Chrysler Museum.

On my way to my morning shower, I pass another bedroom with two canvases by Bruce McKain, one of Bang St., where the Horns stayed when they came to Provincetown for the first time in 1951, the other a view of the harbor, probably painted from the Murchison Hill at the end of town.

When a little later I sit down to breakfast in our apartment dining-living room, I'm surrounded by more than a halfdozen other paint-

ings of Provincetown. There are three by John Whorf, including a magnificent watercolor of the fishing boats in the harbor by moonlight; two small oils of quiet streets done many years ago by Eugene Peterson, a faculty colleague when I was at Pratt Institute; a scene of the dunes at the edge of town painted by Robert Hunter; and a watercolor by Marston Hodgson of the old sea captain's house on the corner of Cook and Commercial Sts., which we have owned since 1954.

In addition, the three portraits of our children on one wall were painted in Provincetown by S. Edmund Oppenheim. Then arriving at my office, I see two more paintings of Provincetown by Provincetown artists whom I know.

We don't really need all these pictures to remind us of Provincetown, of its beauty and its charm — these are indelibly engraved on our memory and firmly implanted in our hearts — but we find that the pictures make the memory more vivid, the thought of happy days on the Lower Cape more heartwarming, and the anticipation of returning to Provincetown more exciting.

The Horns first went to Provincetown by mere chance, urged on by some Baltimore friends, the Ted Lows, who had summered in Provincetown for years. (Mrs. Low was the niece of Mrs. Henry Winslow of Watertown and Cambridge, who first came to Provincetown on her honeymoon over 65 years ago and who has been

coming back every summer since — including this summer, in her 91st year.

The Lows had had a last-minute cancellation for a three-week period of a cottage they traditionally rented for the season and sublet when they couldn't use it. Since I had gone to Dartmouth, I had often heard college-mates speak of "the Cape," but I had never been there and had no desire to go in that fateful summer of 1951. But wifely insistence prevailed, and to Provincetown we went with our three young children.

It was love at first sight. Though my wife was European and had lived in the Far East as well as in Europe, and though I had lived in Egypt and in France, there was no place we have lived in or visited in our travels which

won us so quickly and so thoroughly. Before we left, we had rented a place for all of the next summer.

There followed two summers living in the late Peter Hunt's Village — Provincetown was the poorer when Peter moved his shop to Orleans — across the lane from the newly-opened Ciro and Sal's Restaurant, not then the famous rendezvous for gourmets from all over the Cape which it has now become.

Those were especially happy days, what with daily conversations with "Ma" Hunt, eternally sitting on her stoop in the lane; the bustling activities on Justin Avellar's wharf — where 12-year-old son Mike, having been taught to sail by Berty Bangs, who had gone to the South Pole with the Byrd expedition, now taught kids still younger than he (he's been teaching sailing ever since, most recently as coach of the Harvard and Radcliffe sailing teams); and the going and coming of the motley crowd which frequented Commercial Street.

With it all, the love for Provincetown grew deeper and so before we left in the summer of 1954, we bought the little 150-year-old house next to the Figurehead House where we have summered ever since. We had scarcely signed the papers, incidentally, when the 1954 hurricane struck and took down a chimney and the only tree we had in the yard. We have grown to love the house, too, and each summer has made us more attached to Provincetown.

Since we first came to the Lower Cape, in the winter we have lived in six different cities. Provincetown, where we have summered for 18 years, now represents "home" to us. We look forward to retiring there and are contemplating purchasing a lot in the cemetery so we can be buried there.

Our three children, who have literally grown up in Provincetown, look forward to the time when they can have homes there. Even one day in Provincetown is so worthwhile, that several times this summer I have driven up from New York on Friday only to return on Sunday — a trip of over 600 miles in heavy traffic.

There are, I know, many Cape Codders who cannot stand Provincetown and cannot be dragooned into coming there, unless they reluctantly squire some visiting VIP who has insisted on seeing this most famous of American summer resorts. But for Provincetowners, whether by birth or by adoption, whether year-round or summer residents, there is no other place. Other parts of the Cape have their attractions, but to those of us who have succumbed to Provincetown, these attractions cannot lure us away.

Let us be honest and admit that life in Provincetown isn't always an unmixed blessing. One had better avoid the center of town on a Saturday night. It is worse than Greenwich Village on the weekend. Since we live on Bleecker Street ourselves, we come to Provincetown, among other things, to get away from the Village atmosphere, but it can't really be done during "the season."

Nowhere else on the Cape, however, is there such a combination of natural beauty and human interest. The dunes surpass all others on the Cape. The sunsets from Race Point are unequalled on this continent. The harbor is alive, not just with pleasure boats, but with the fishing fleet, from which many Portuguese and still a few old Yankees make their livelihood.

This makes life real, and the closing hymn which is always sung in the little Episcopal Church of St. Mary's is the Harbor, calling upon God's protection for those at sea, has genuine meaning to Provincetowners. The natural beauty of Provincetown, moreover, is enhanced by the quaintness and the historic interest of the town.

Finally, nowhere on the Cape is there such a large group of exciting, creative people — artists, musicians, writers. The tradition was set years ago by such great ones as Charles Hawthorne, Mary Heaton Vorse, Eugene O'Neill, all dead now. But, thank heaven, Admiral Donald B. MacMillan is alive and well and still living in Provincetown as her first citizen, Harry Kemp, "poet of the dunes" and a familiar figure on Commercial Street, is dead. Colorful Manny Zora, "the sea fox", has returned to his native Azores. Other familiar bohemian characters have also gone.

But the town is still alive with the well-known and unknown. They continue to make the old place hum. And their liveliness enhances the ineffable beauty of sun, sand and sea.

For these reasons and many more there is no time to set forth in this column, the Horns not only choose Cape Cod, they choose Provincetown.