

PROVINCETOWN: THE ART COLONY

A Chronology and Guide

Nyla Ahrens



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On the cover: Charles Hawthorne and Class, c.1913
unknown photographer, PAAM Archives

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Museum, 460 Commercial Street, Provincetown, MA 02657

INTRODUCTION

Provincetown is the origin of many paintings famous in the history of twentieth century American art; not only the place where they were first painted, but where they were first exhibited, discussed and sold.

Ronald A. Kuchta

Foreword,

Provincetown Painters 1890's-1970's

The Provincetown art colony that began in the late 1800s is alive and vibrant today. America's oldest continuous art colony still attracts artists and lovers of art as it has for more than one hundred years.

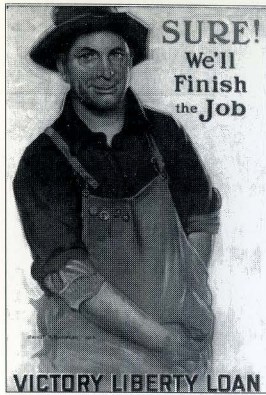
Provincetown is a painters' town. They are drawn here by the brilliant light reflected off sand and water; by the natural beauty and picturesque village; by the sense of vitality and creativity and freedom.

There is no one "Provincetown Style" of painting. Provincetown painters have included Realists, Impressionists, Expressionists and Abstractionists. While philosophical battles have raged over the years, openness to the new has been typical of this very small and intense community.

Provincetown is a supportive place, cherishing its remarkable heritage and nurturing its new talents. Take a walk through the narrow streets of Provincetown, tracing its history and viewing the brushstrokes of its future.

Nyla Ahrens
Provincetown 1997

*For Larry + Wade
I hope this adds
of all your enjoyment
down
Nyla*



Gerrit Beneker, WWI Poster

THE ART COLONY: A CHRONOLOGY

- The arrival of the railroad in 1873 made Provincetown accessible to both tourists and artists. Attracted by the incredible light and colorful surroundings, painters could stay in inexpensive boarding houses and rent studios for \$50 per year.

- The Provincetown art colony came into being when Charles Webster Hawthorne opened his Cape Cod School of Art in the summer of 1899. By 1915 as many as 90 students were enrolled to learn his style of impressionist painting *en plein air*.

- E. Ambrose Webster, who had studied the later work of Monet, opened his Summer School of Painting in 1900. A pioneer of Modernism on the Outer Cape, he taught an advanced approach to color.

- In 1914 the Provincetown Art Association was founded. Business and professional people from the community as well as established artists provided the initial leadership. Hawthorne, Webster and William Halsall were among the first honorary vice presidents. The first annual exhibition was held in the summer of 1915.

- On August 27, 1916, a Boston Globe headline read "Biggest Art Colony in the World at Provincetown." More than 300 artists and students were in town (25 year-round) and six schools of art were in operation. Expatriate artists who had been studying and working in France returned, fleeing the war.

- At the same time there was an influx of poets, novelists, journalists and playwrights as well as artists from Greenwich Village, bringing with them a bohemian lifestyle. A group of radical writers, actors and artists that became known as The Provincetown Players produced plays on Lewis Wharf in the East End. Eugene O'Neill's breakthrough play "Bound East For Cardiff" was first staged there.

- Six artists formed the Provincetown Printers in 1915, developing a unique method of woodcut printing, making single block or "white line" prints. The method lent itself to



Charles Hawthorne painting class, c.1912
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives

E. Ambrose Webster painting class, c.1910
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



personal cubist styles soon developed by Agnes Weinrich and Blanche Lazzell. By 1918 the enlarged group established a gallery on the site of the present Post Office and sent traveling shows through the United States, Canada and Europe.

- The Armory Show of 1913 had introduced Modernism to the American public and made apparent growing rifts in the art world. The Provincetown Painting Classes, begun by Ross Moffett and Heinrich Pfeiffer in the '20s, were modernist in approach. By 1925, Moffett, Karl Knaths and other artists were fighting the conservatism of the Art Association and, beginning in 1927, the Association held a separate modernist show each year.

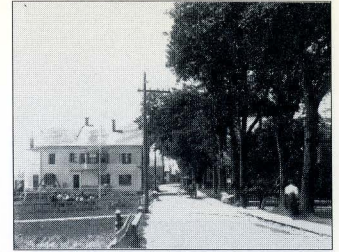
- In the '30s, Henry Hensche opened his Cape School of Art. Hensche taught in Provincetown for more than 55 years, continuing *plein air* demonstrations and many other Hawthorne traditions.

- In 1935 Hans Hofmann opened his Summer School of Art. Famed as a teacher of abstract modernism, Hofmann taught and painted here for 30 years while also maintaining his New York school in the winter. His classes grew large in the post-war years with the influx of students enrolled under the GI Bill, and artists of all styles crowded into his Friday critiques.

- The Depression years of the '30s were difficult for everyone, although federal WPA programs provided some support for artists, especially year-rounders. During World War II the town was blacked-out; artists and townspeople were away serving in the military or working in defense plants. Art activity was very limited although the Surrealists Roberto Matta, Arshile Gorky and Max Ernst arrived around this time, as did Robert Motherwell and the noted patrons and collectors Ione and Hudson Walker.

- In 1937 the first combined exhibition of work by modernists and 'regulars' was held at the Art Association; by then it was hard to distinguish between them.

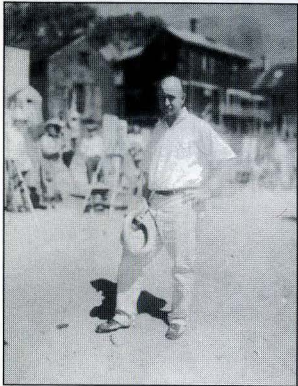
- From the '40s to the '50s, Provincetown was a summer center of Abstract Expressionism represented by such painters as Franz Kline, Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Motherwell, Helen Frankenthaler and Fritz Bultman, in addition to Hofmann.



Commercial Street, East End
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



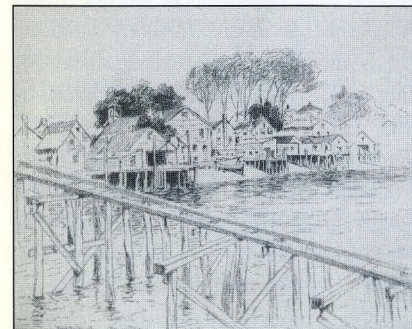
A. Garland Hall, Parade Group, 1919
black and white photograph
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



Charles Hawthorne, c.1915
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives

- In 1949, Forum 49 was a summer-long series of sophisticated programs beginning with the forum "What Is An Artist?" and ending with the controversial "French Art vs American Art Today." Record crowds attended the exhibits of paintings and programs focused on the *avant garde* in many areas (architecture, psychoanalysis, poetry, jazz) all held in a gallery at 200 Commercial Street.
- Galleries of high quality proliferated in the '50s and '60s. Artists' cooperatives were established and branches of New York galleries opened on Commercial Street.
- The Chrysler Museum opened in 1958 showing works from almost every period of art history and presenting the latest in contemporary art. Chrysler collected local art, encouraging more young artists, collectors and galleries to come to town.
- When the Art Association celebrated its Golden Anniversary in 1964 it gained national attention with an exhibition tracing the history of Provincetown as an art colony.
- In 1970 a forum was held at the Association asking "What Is Happening to Our Art Colony?" What had been the summer art colony now seemed overcrowded and tourist-oriented and the few studios remaining rented for as much as \$1,500 for the season.
- The Fine Arts Work Center, which had opened in 1968, moved into its permanent quarters in 1972. Their goal was "to give young writers and visual artists the chance to live on their own and work ... bringing new blood into the community and encouraging artists to settle there."
- The Town purchased the former Chrysler Museum in 1976, creating the Provincetown Heritage Museum to preserve and present historical artifacts including the Town's large collection of paintings by local artists.
- The significance of Provincetown's role as an art colony was documented with the publication in 1977 of Dorothy Seckler's Provincetown Painters 1890's-1970's by the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York and an exhibition shown at both the Everson and the Provincetown Art Association.

- With the hope of enlivening the local art scene, the Long Point Gallery was opened in 1977. It remains a cooperative gallery operated by a group of established local artists, most of whom have studios and galleries in New York.
- In 1979 the first annual Fall Arts Festival was held, a tradition which continues today. Special events, performances and exhibitions are scheduled along with open houses in artists' studios.
- In 1985 Christopher Busa, son of late abstract painter Peter Busa, published the first issue of Provincetown Arts. It is an annual publication now averaging almost 200 pages "focusing broadly on the artists and writers who inhabit or visit the tip of Cape Cod."
- In May 1992 the Berta Walker Gallery opened an exhibition entitled "Generations in the Arts: Provincetown." On display was work by artists from families having two or more generations in the arts who were born or worked in Provincetown. Thirty-two families were represented.
- Since Charles Hawthorne's arrival in 1899, the Provincetown art colony has played a significant role in the history of American art -- often in the forefront. A microcosm of the larger art world, Provincetown has both welcomed and resisted new art movements. Today there is not one dominant teacher or school or style of art. In Provincetown, as elsewhere, pluralism is the mode. As the century ends, both established and emerging artists feel free to seek their own styles of expression.



W.H.W. Bicknell, untitled, 1919, etching
Provincetown Art Association and Museum collection



George Yater, Art Association, c.1950
black and white photograph
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives

PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION AND MUSEUM

The Provincetown Art Association was established on August 22, 1914 by a group of artists and townspeople; to this day, the officers and members are a mix of artists and supporters of the arts. The original membership was 147; by 1917 it had grown to 288. The first president, who held office for 22 years, was president of one of the local banks; the five honorary vice presidents were artists. Their early stated goals were to build a permanent collection of paintings by local artists and to hold exhibitions to draw artists and people interested in the arts closer together.

Meetings were held featuring lectures and slides from the American Federation of Art shown on the Association's stereopticon lantern. The first session "British Paintings" was attended by 125 people. On July 3, 1915, the Association opened its first exhibition in Town Hall with 44 artists participating.

The Association needed a home and the present property was purchased in 1918 for \$5,000. In 1921 F.A. Days and Sons were pushed to remodel the existing building in time for the Seventh Annual Show to be held there. Other gallery space was added in later decades: the Little Gallery (a portion of which is now the Library) in 1930; the Hawthorne Memorial Gallery in 1942; the Carl Murchison Gallery in 1960; the Moffett Gallery and the Herman and Mary Robinson Museum School in the '70s.

In the '20s and '30s the philosophical wars that were being waged throughout the art world were also fought within the Association. The artist-founders of the Museum came out of the Impressionist tradition and, although a variety of styles had been represented in their members' exhibitions since the beginning, the Association's establishment did not readily incorporate the modernist movement. Divisions within the organization led to the mounting of two separate shows. For ten years, beginning in 1927, the "modernistic" exhibition was held in July and the "regular" one in August.

The Depression years of the '30s and the war years of the early '40s were difficult times for the town and for the Association. Although annual shows were canceled and the books at one point showed a balance of \$3.60, volunteers managed to maintain a reduced schedule of exhibitions. By 1947 printed catalogs were again being published.

While the post-war boom brought increased membership and sales of art to the Association, some of the major artists of that time stayed away. The rise of the Abstract Expressionists and deep divisions within the arts community again buffeted the Association. In town, galleries were opening, new schools of art emerging and *avant garde* art flourishing quite apart from the Association. A fine arts museum opened in 1958, created with the wealth of Walter Chrysler, Jr.

When the Association celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1964 with a retrospective show, it focused national attention on the Association's considerable contribution to American art and seemed to revitalize the organization. Activities were increased, new galleries added and a storage vault built to house the expanding collection. Museum status was achieved, although it had always been a collecting institution. In 1967, the 100th juried show was held, the Association had 600 members and once again it served as the center of the local art world.

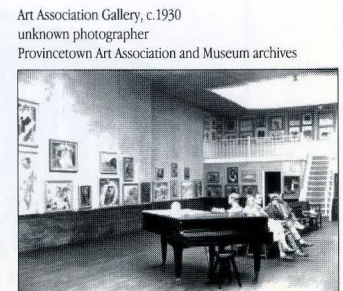
Three of several major theme shows held in recent times traced the relationship of the Provincetown colony to other important art centers. "Crosscurrents" (1986) presented works from PAAM and the Guild Hall Museum in East Hampton, Long Island; "The League at the Cape" (1993) was an historical exhibition of artists connected with both the Art Students League in New York and PAAM; and "New York-Provincetown: A 50s Connection" (1994) showed work of Abstract Expressionists based in both places.

Today the Provincetown Art Association and Museum maintains a busy schedule of activities year-round with a paid professional staff and cadre of volunteers. There are member shows, both juried and open, and curated exhibitions, thematic and retrospective. Readings, concerts, dance, drama and film bring other arts into the main gallery. The Museum School, established in 1982, offers studio classes in painting, sculpture and printmaking in both Summer and Winter Sessions.

Now numbering more than 1,500 works, the collection continues to expand with donations from artists, their families and collectors, and is exhibited on a rotating basis. The annual consignment auction of art from Provincetown's past draws buyers from across the land and makes a significant contribution to the budget, but the Association still relies on the support of its members -- artists and patrons of the arts.



Art Association Gallery, c.1930
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



Art Association Gallery, c.1930
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives

FORMER DAYS LUMBERYARD/FINE ARTS WORK CENTER

The Days family were the biggest contractors in Provincetown in the early part of the century, constructing a number of public buildings as well as private homes. They also owned many properties in town, several of which were made into artists' studios and rented at low rates. The availability of this kind of space helped encourage artists to come to Provincetown.

Frank Days Jr. built the complex of buildings at 24 Pearl Street in 1911 to house his lumber, coal and wood, plumbing and heating supply business, then added ten studios on the second floor. These unheated and unfurnished spaces, sharing one common toilet, rented for \$50 a season -- usually just the warmer months, although a few hardy souls survived the winter there. Charles Demuth painted a cubist view of the exterior stairway in 1920 which is now owned by the Museum of Modern Art.

Ross Moffett was the first tenant; he and his fellow-student Henry Sutter moved into Unit #2 in July of 1914. Charles Hawthorne rented Unit #1 soon thereafter and several of his students, including Edwin Dickinson, followed. Hawthorne's monumental painting of "The Crew of the Philomena Manta" was painted there using other studio residents as models.

From 1914 to 1971, Days Lumberyard housed painters and sculptors from each of the successive periods of art in Provincetown. It was always a place for serious work, but for many it was also a community, a home, and the site of passionate aesthetic discussions. In the summer of 1945 Hans Hofmann used Fritz Bultman's studio for teaching as well as painting and a number of his students from both Chicago and New York followed him here.

Joe Oliver bought the property in 1951, adding heat, hot water, toilets and stoves while doing major renovations. He also began raising rents, which finally reached \$250 for the season. In 1972 Oliver sold the former Lumberyard to the Fine Arts Work Center.

In 1978 an exhibition at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, "Day's Lumberyard," showed the work of 60 artists who had rented space at the Lumberyard; another 40 were listed. The catalog contains a memoir by Robert Motherwell recalling the summers of 1961-62 when he and Helen Frankenthaler rented the renovated barn at the Lumberyard.

Founded by a group of artists, writers and patrons, the Work Center was developed at a time when tourism was burgeoning, studio space was limited and expensive, and in many ways the community of artists was at a low point in its history. The founders believed it essential to the life of the art colony to bring new artists and writers to town and to foster their growth, with the hope that some would choose to remain in the community.

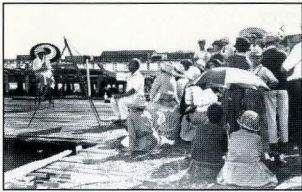
The Work Center had been operating since 1968 in a building on Standish Street, but moving to the Lumberyard in 1972 meant that they now had adequate studio and workspace available. Since then two adjoining houses have been purchased, making it possible to house all 20 annual fellows on campus. The plumbing and heating storerooms were converted to the Hudson D. Walker Gallery in 1976, named for the Center's most generous benefactor and early president. In 1989 the Stanley Kunitz Common Room was dedicated to the Pulitzer Prize winning poet and FAWC founder.

The Fine Arts Work Center is the only artists' fellowship program in the country providing long-term residencies for emerging artists and writers. They are given living quarters, a place to work, some financial assistance and opportunities to consult with established artists. There are more than 1,000 applicants from the United States and abroad for the 20 fellowships offered annually. Over the past three decades, many of the Fellows have remained in town after their fellowship year.

The Fellows are in residence from October through April. Readings and exhibitions by the Fellows are scheduled, and throughout the year Visiting Artists and Writers programs are held along with shows by Committee and Board members. In the summer, weeklong open enrollment workshops are offered and weeklong residencies available. A special program of Senior Fellowships for writers and artists was inaugurated in 1995.

Maurice Berezov, On the Catwalk, Days Lumberyard
l to r: Florence Grippe, Peter Grippe, Sam Kootz, Fritz Bultman, Hans Hofmannl, Perle Fine
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives





Hawthorne painting class, c.1922
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives

CAPE COD SCHOOL OF ART

The Cape Cod School of Art was founded by Charles W. Hawthorne at the turn of the century when Impressionism was held in high esteem, art colonies were popular in Europe and summer schools of art were emerging in America. It was a time, too, when art students studied with 'master teachers,' following their teachers from place to place. Hawthorne had studied with the popular American Impressionist William Merritt Chase at the Art Students League in New York City and at his summer school on eastern Long Island.

Beginning in 1899, Hawthorne taught his *plein air* method of painting on Provincetown's waterfront in the summer and taught at the Art Students League in the winter. Typically Hawthorne's model would be posed in bright sunlight, face shaded with a hat or parasol so no features were visible. Often as many as 100 people watched as he painted at his easel, dramatically demonstrating his theory of color and the effects of light on an object.

Hawthorne was 28 when he established his school and he taught at his home on Miller Hill, adding a barn studio as his classes increased in size. He attracted students from all parts of the country, with as many as 90 enrolled in a session. In 1928 Hawthorne charged \$50 for the summer and scholarships were abundant. Weekly demonstrations were held outdoors in sunny weather. To encourage a broad approach, Hawthorne used innovative techniques, requiring his students to apply color with blunt-ended putty knives rather than brushes. Each Saturday their work was reviewed in a critique session lasting for hours.

Hawthorne taught his students to paint directly from nature. While many of them became fine Impressionist landscape artists whose works were filled with color and light, many also became noted abstract artists. Hawthorne himself was primarily a figurative painter in oils, working in a darker style of Impressionism than the one he taught.

When Hawthorne died suddenly in 1930, Henry Hensche changed the school's name to the Cape School of Art and moved it to 48 Pearl Street, where Hawthorne had at one time maintained a studio. Hensche had studied with Hawthorne for eight years and worked as one of his assistants. He maintained Hawthorne's teaching procedures and theories.



Painter working on the beach, c.1925
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives

Hawthorne painting class, c.1926
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



For 55 years Hensche taught in Provincetown, continuing the tradition of *plein air* demonstration and extended criticism. He also continued to send students out to paint in the dunes and on the waterfront. Hensche developed the "brick system" where students used as subjects solid blocks painted in single strong colors and placed in the outdoor light. This allowed them to concentrate on mass rather than detail, seeing the effect of light and shadow on color.

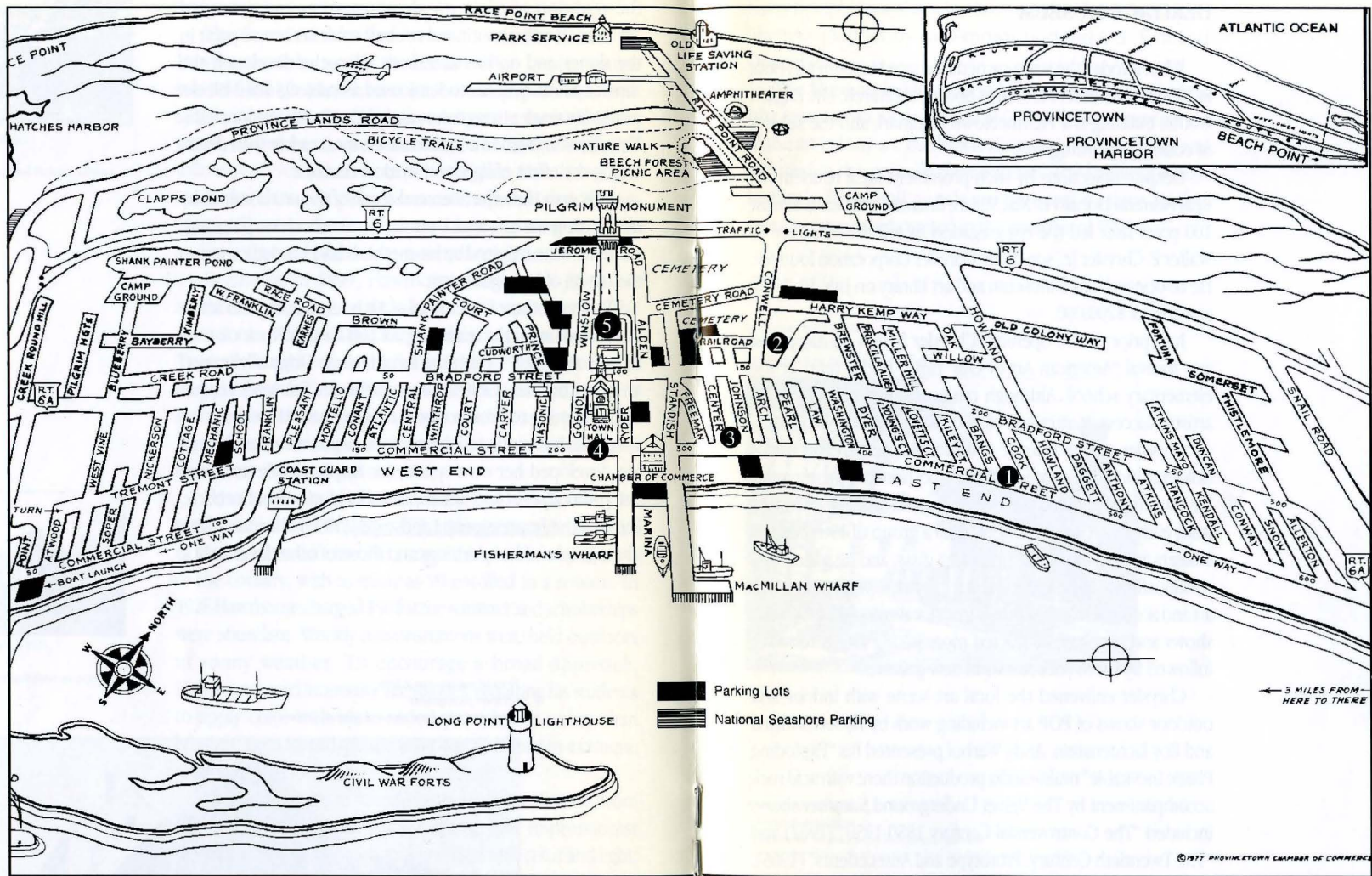
Although Hensche alienated some of the arts community by his dogmatism and opposition to modern painting, students were inspired by his methods and his dedication to the tenets of Impressionism.

Today the Cape Cod School of Art is an on-going and active institution under the leadership of Lois Griffel. She took over the school in 1985, restoring its old name. Originally trained as an art teacher, Griffel attended the Art Students League before coming to Provincetown to study with Hensche.

Griffel has continued the tradition begun with Hawthorne, but developed her own system for helping students to see and paint *en plein air*. She explains her methods in her book, Painting the Impressionist Landscape, (1994) illustrated with photographs of her paintings and those of other local artists.

Hensche painting class, c.1938
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives





① Provincetown Art Association and Museum
460 Commercial Street

② Heritage Museum

③ Fine Arts Work Center
24 Pearl Street

④ Town Hall

⑤ Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum

FORMER CHRYSLER MUSEUM/ HERITAGE MUSEUM

What is today the town-owned Heritage Museum was built in 1860 as the Center Methodist Episcopal Church. The English Gothic building is a Provincetown landmark and the subject of countless paintings.

Despite objections by such prominent local residents as Rear Admiral Donald B. MacMillan, financial problems almost 100 years later led the congregation to sell the structure to Walter P. Chrysler Jr., son of the Chrysler Corporation founder. He re-opened it as a museum and art library on July 10, 1958, at a cost of \$200,000.

Just prior to the opening, Chrysler held a 34-day juried arts festival "American Art of Our Time" under tents at the elementary school. Although critics did not consider it an artistic success, it attracted 26,000 visitors.

Chrysler was an eclectic collector whose heterogeneous holdings included some works of questionable provenance. His museum contained pieces covering the range of art history from early Egyptian to modern, with a group of 19th century Masters and a major collection of art glass, and he added to it continually. He had a great interest in contemporary American art and acquired many paintings from local artists. The Chrysler shows and purchases attracted more young artists to town, followed by more collectors and new galleries.

Chrysler enlivened the local art scene with indoor and outdoor shows of POP art including work by Robert Indiana and Roy Lichtenstein. Andy Warhol presented his "Exploding Plastic Inevitable" multi-media production there with acid rock accompaniment by The Velvet Underground. Summer shows included "The Controversial Century 1850-1950" (1962) and "The Twentieth Century, Prototype and Antecedents" (1965).

Chrysler moved his collection to Norfolk, Virginia in 1971 and sold the building in 1974. The new owners turned it into a center for the arts which was not successful. In 1975 it was designated a National Registered Landmark and, at the Fall Town Meeting, residents voted to purchase the building to use as a museum for preservation of the town's historic and artistic legacy, including its significant collection of paintings.

In the museum today, scenes from domestic and business life of the past have been recreated with wax figures and authentic artifacts. Antique fire and marine equipment is on display as is a 60 foot (half-scale) model of the "Rose

Dorothea," a famous Provincetown fishing schooner. Poet Harry Kemp's dune shack has been reconstructed, next to his likeness painted by well-known portraitist S. Edmund Oppenheim.

The Museum holdings include more than 200 paintings (the town owns a total of almost 350). Works from every period of the art colony are on display throughout the building and included in the periodic theme shows. The studies for Ross Moffett's Town Hall murals are here and a major Moffett retrospective was mounted in the summer of 1995.

Methodist Church, c.1920
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



Provincetown Fishing Fleet, c.1915
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



TOWN HALL

Built in 1885, Town Hall is the seat of Provincetown's government. Paintings from the town's large collection of work by local artists hang in its corridors, offices and meeting rooms. In 1915 the Art Association presented its first exhibition here and, until 1921, scheduled two major Town Hall shows each year. For decades the Artists' Costume Ball also was held here.

In the main corridor hang two paintings by Charles Hawthorne. By establishing his Cape Cod School of Art in 1899 Hawthorne brought into being the Provincetown art colony. Although Hawthorne's teaching methods involved painting in brilliant sunlight and his weekly demonstration classes were most often held outdoors, his masterpiece "The Crew of the Philomena Manta" was painted in his studio at Days Lumberyard where students, fellow artists and townspeople posed for him. This painting and "Fish Cleaners" on the opposite wall reflect Hawthorne's abiding interest in the life of the local Portuguese fishermen.

Ross Moffett studied with Hawthorne and was one of the first year-round painters in Provincetown, moving into Days Lumberyard in 1914. "Gathering Beach Plums" and "Spreading Nets," his large murals in the entrance were painted in 1934 under the federal Public Works of Art Project of the Depression era. An easel painter and monotype artist, Moffett undertook only one other mural commission in his career. In 1954 he painted murals for the Eisenhower Memorial Museum in Abilene, Kansas, under the sponsorship of the National Academy of Art. Moffett's paintings "Ploughing" and "Shankpainter Pond" hang in other areas of Town Hall.

Another Hawthorne student and head of the Cape School of Art, Henry Hensche is represented by a painting in the corridor, "His Breakfast." Also in that corridor is "The Peaked Hills of Cape Cod" by William Halsall, who served with Hawthorne as one of the Art Association's first officers.

More than thirty other paintings from the Provincetown art collection can be seen in Town Hall offices and hallways. Demonstrating a variety of styles, most of the work was produced in the first half of the 20th century and many of the pieces are Provincetown scenes.



1916 Art Association Exhibition in Town Hall
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives

WHARVES

The railway was extended to Provincetown in 1873 to ship fresh fish from the Old Colony Railroad wharf to Boston and New York, but it soon brought tourists and artists to town. The Boston boats docked here as well, bringing visitors by water. In later years the wharf was replaced by MacMillan Pier, named for famous son Rear Admiral Donald MacMillan, who explored the North Pole with Admiral Peary.

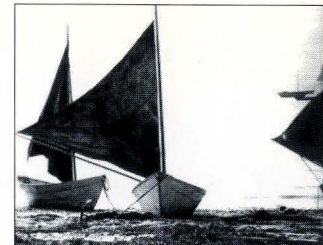
In its whaling and fishing heyday, Provincetown had more than 50 wharves along the waterfront, many of which were destroyed in the Portland Gale of 1898. Those that remained were a major attraction for artists who painted the colorful fishing fleet and the Portuguese fishermen. Old photographs show Hawthorne conducting classes on a wharf, demonstrating his method of *plein air* painting. The wharves offered nourishment as well as inspiration; fishermen shared their catch with impoverished artists.

As the fishing industry declined, wharf buildings were left vacant in the summer, to be given new use as artists' studios and apartments. It was on Lewis Wharf, owned by writer Mary Heaton Vorse, that the Provincetown Players presented the first production of a Eugene O'Neill play. "Bound East for Cardiff" opened on July 18, 1916 in the former fish house. Three other theater groups also used buildings on the wharves for their performances.

Vorse rented the top floor of the Lewis Wharf fishhouse to an art school. After the Provincetown Players left for New York City, artists once again set up their easels on the wharf. In 1920, six enterprising students who had come to town to study with Hawthorne converted the Lewis Wharf theater space into an alcohol-free nightclub "The Sixes and Sevens." They provided refreshments, entertainment and dancing from 8-11 nightly with a cover charge of eleven cents. A great success for two summers, it burned down late in 1921.

Except for MacMillan Pier and Fisherman's Wharf, the big commercial wharves are now gone. As the wooden structures gradually collapsed, their rotting pilings were commemorated in paintings of every style.

Today artists still set their easels on the wharf, looking back at the skyline or across the harbor to Long Point. And they still try to capture the incredible Provincetown light reflecting off the water.

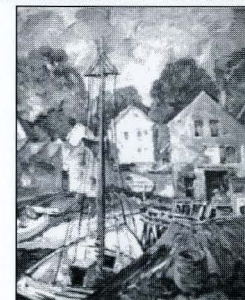


Dories on the Beach, c.1915
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



Unknown artist, white line woodblock print
Private Collection

Wallace Bassford, Provincetown Wharfs, 1929
Provincetown Art Association and Museum collection



GALLERIES

Although the designated "gallery district" is in the East End, there are galleries in the West End and Town Center as well.

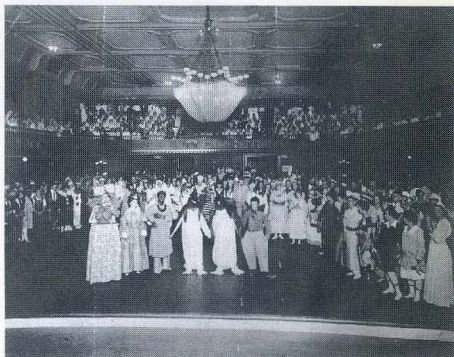
In the summer of 1949, Forum 49 was held at 200 Commercial Street (Gallery 200). This ground-breaking series of exhibitions, lectures and forums focused on new ideas in the art world, drawing large audiences and rave reviews from the New York critics. The Forum included the first major exhibition of Abstract Expressionist art in the country.

The first artists' cooperative gallery was established in 1953. For two years Gallery 256 was located under the movie house next to Town Hall. The Provincetown Group Gallery, formed in 1964, lasted more than 25 years and the Long Point Gallery, established in 1976 by a group of noted artists, remains active today at 492 Commercial Street.

The '50s and '60s saw the emergence of high quality commercial galleries, many of them branches of New York galleries. In 1964 the Art Association catalog contained ads for 13 galleries (and 11 art schools). New York dealer Sam Kootz opened the Kootz Gallery in 1953 at 481 Commercial Street; in 1955 Nat Halper took it over, naming it HCE. Until 1967, the HCE was Provincetown's premier gallery, sponsoring prominent artists who also were shown in New York or who had already achieved success at other local galleries.

The Sun Gallery was the smallest and most innovative gallery of that time. Located at 393 Commercial Street, it operated on a shoestring from 1956 to 1959, providing a place for young off-beat artists working in a figurative style. Many went on to fame and success in the larger art world. Sun Gallery owners Yvonne Anderson and Dominic Falcone held art exhibitions and presented readings by poets such as Ferlinghetti and Happenings by Red Grooms.

Artists Ball, 1916
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives

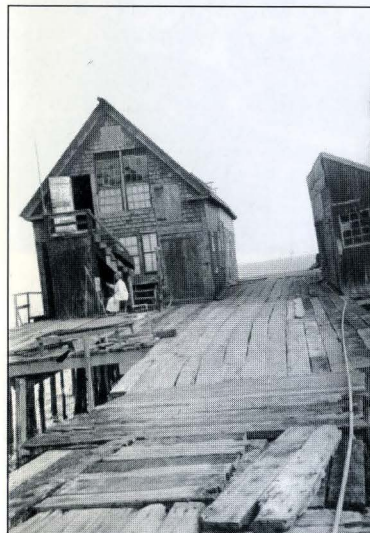


Both the unconventional Sun and the elegant HCE were part of the ritual Friday night gallery stroll. Most galleries opened their new shows on that night and gallery goes thronged from East to West End, visiting each opening party on the way.

The '70s saw major changes in Provincetown's art scene including the closing of many galleries. With the resurgence of art institutions and activities in the '80s and '90s, galleries reappeared and remain strong and numerous today. More than ever before are staying open throughout much of the year.

The gallery stroll is still a popular feature of the summer art season. On weekend nights gallery owners schedule openings and everyone is invited to visit and view and sip wine. Gallery schedules are printed in the local papers and the Provincetown Gallery Guild annually publishes a brochure listing members with descriptions, addresses and a map.

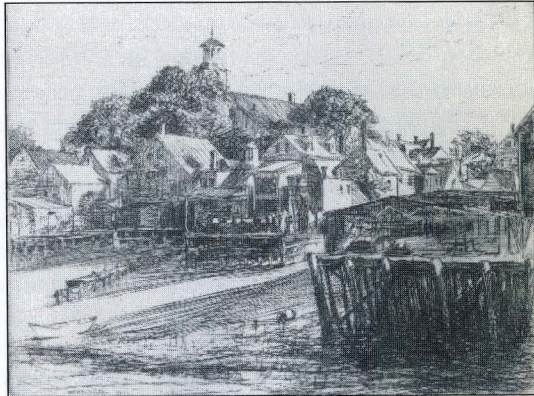
Painter outside wharf studio, c.1920
unknown photographer
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



AND ALL AROUND THE TOWN

In Provincetown, paintings are not just consigned to museums and galleries to be dutifully viewed on special occasions -- they are part of the residents' everyday life. In addition to Town Hall and the Heritage Museum, almost every municipal building displays paintings from the Town's extensive collection, including the high school, elementary school, library and Manor (the town-owned nursing home).

The two local banks show paintings on loan from the Art Association and many restaurants, clubs, guest houses, real estate and insurance offices and other businesses display work from the owners' collections. Art is commonly seen in private homes, even very modest ones, and local artists as well as visiting art students may be viewed year-round, working at their easels set in the narrow streets and on the wharves -- painting the art of tomorrow.



W.H.W. Bicknell, *Higgings Wharf*, 1921, etching
Provincetown Art Association and Museum collection

FORMER HANS HOFMANN SCHOOL

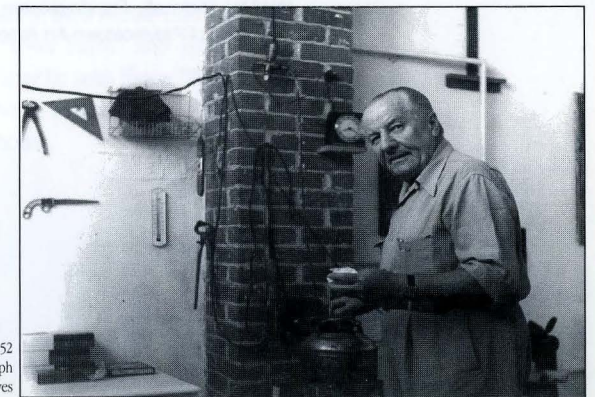
Hans Hofmann is considered by many critics to have been the greatest and most influential teacher of art in America in this century.

Hofmann already had received international recognition as an artist and teacher when he first came to Provincetown in the '30s. He had studied in Paris, operated his own school in Munich, taught at the Art Students League and other American schools of art. He established the Hans Hofmann School of Fine Arts in New York in 1934 and in 1935 opened his summer school in Provincetown.

He first leased the former Hawthorne home and barn studio on Miller Hill, then taught in Fritz Bultman's studio in Days Lumberyard, the first time space there was used for classes. In 1945 Hofmann bought the Commercial Street property from seascape painter Frederick Waugh, using the large studio for teaching. This building at 76 Commercial Street is a private home, not open for viewing.

After the war his classes were filled with established artists as well as neophytes, and his Friday afternoon critiques drew crowds of artists, critics and vacationers. It was said that nearly everyone of importance in the world of modern art came to these sessions at least once and many major artists were drawn by his presence to spend summers in Provincetown. Among those who came were Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Larry Rivers, Fritz Bultman, Franz Kline and Mark Rothko.

Perhaps because of his accented mixture of English, French and German, or his partial deafness, Hofmann developed his own way of teaching by showing students what he meant. He would make alterations directly on students' work or attach scraps to show alternative compositions. He never, however, let students view his own work, fearing that they would become imitative rather than develop their own styles.



Maurice Berezov, Hans Hofmann in His Studio, 1952
black and white photograph
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives

After 43 years of teaching -- 23 in Provincetown -- Hofmann closed both of his schools in 1958 in order to paint full-time. Long renowned as a teacher, he now was given due recognition as a painter, including a major exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in 1963. Hans Hofmann died in 1966 shortly after hanging a show of his work at the Kootz Gallery in New York.



W.H.W. Bicknell, *Provincetown 1919*, etching
Collection of Provincetown Art Association and Museum

PILGRIM MONUMENT AND PROVINCETOWN MUSEUM

The Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum on top of High Pole Hill commemorates the Pilgrims' landing in Provincetown in 1620 and the signing of the Mayflower Compact. It is the tallest all-granite structure in the US and is modeled after a tower in Siena, Italy. Reached by a system of stairs and ramps, the observation area at the top affords views of much of Cape Cod.

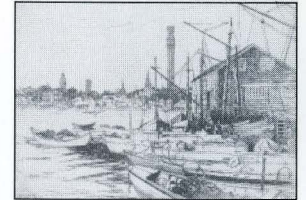
The Cape Cod Memorial Association, a private organization, built and operates the monument and museum which opened in 1910. The Association began collecting historical materials in 1892 and has continued to receive donations since opening. The Ladies Research Club of Provincetown (descendents of Mayflower passengers) also began collecting local art and artifacts in this same period. In 1924 they purchased the Lancy Mansion at 230 Commercial Street and opened an historical museum. When the Club disbanded in 1956, their collection was transferred to the Association.

The present collection includes items from major periods in Cape Cod and Provincetown history including a captain's cabin from a whaling ship and artifacts from Admiral MacMillan's arctic trips.

In the gallery illustrating the Pilgrims' stay in Provincetown, there is a quarter-scale diorama of the Mayflower executed by artist Courtney Allen. One of the creators of the Sixes and Sevens nightclub on Lewis Wharf, he also was responsible for the scale model of that wharf where the first production of a Eugene O'Neill play was presented.

The Museum houses a collection of early Provincetown art, displaying selected items as part of their theme exhibits. Works such as Ross Moffett's "Iowa Farm" and Henry Hensche's "The Unwilling Model" may be seen there. "White Roses and Delphiniums" is the work of Marion Campbell Hawthorne, wife of Charles Hawthorne.

W.H.W. Bicknell, *Wharf and Monument*, etching
Provincetown Art Association and Museum collection



Walter Krajicek, *Artists at Work, 1946*, b/w photo
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



THE BACK SHORE

In times past, the ocean beach framed by towering dunes was known as the "back shore" or "outside shore." In the mid-1800s Thoreau wrote of the grandeur of "sea and desert" after walking on the dunes. Perhaps the first painter known to have come here, Marcus Waterman arrived around 1875 to paint the dunes after having painted in the Sahara.

Over the years artists and writers have walked and worked and partied on the outer beaches and dunes. A number of them built shacks (without electricity or running water) in the dunes, where they stayed in the more clement months, although some artists have lived year round in dune shacks.

The "back shore" is part of the Province Lands, now incorporated into the National Seashore. The Cape Cod National Seashore, established in 1961, is an area of nearly 44,000 acres stretching from Chatham to Provincetown and administered by the National Park Service. Provincetown artist and amateur archeologist Ross Moffett headed the group of citizens, mostly artists and writers, who fought for inclusion of the Province Lands in the National Seashore despite strong local opposition. Since 1654 the Province Lands had been a protected area and existed in an essentially virgin state. In large measure due to Moffett's efforts, the Province Lands were deeded to the National Seashore on July 26, 1962.

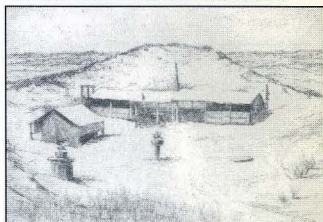
Today the Park Service both protects the area and welcomes visitors. There are parking lots at Race Point Beach and a Visitor Center nearby. It is possible to walk over the dunes and into the "back shore" from Route 6; the Ranger-led walking tours or dune buggy tours provide a good introduction.

Some dune shacks still stand and remain in use; the shack lived in by poet Harry Kemp has been moved from its site and is on display in the Heritage Museum. Published in 1988, From the Peaked Hills, A Collection of Writing and Drawing reflects the experience of many artists and writers on the "back shore."

Harry Kemp, Poet of the Dunes
unknown photographer



W.H.W. Bicknell, untitled, 1940, etching
Provincetown Art Association and Museum archives



FURTHER READING

- Del Deo, Josephine C. Figures in a Landscape. The Donning Company, Virginia Beach, VA. 1994
- Egan, Leona Rust. Provincetown As A Stage. Parnassus Imprints, 1994
- Moffett, Ross. Art In Narrow Streets. Cape Cod Pilgrim Memorial Assn. 1989.
- Provincetown Arts, Annual issues, 1985 on
- Reffe, Candice, ed. From the Peaked Hills. Peaked Hills Trust, 1988.
- Seckler, Dorothy. Provincetown Painters 1890's-1970's. Visual Arts Publications, 1977.
- Vorse, Mary Heaton. Time and The Town. Cape Cod Pilgrim Memorial Assn., 1990. (originally published 1942)

Vevers, Tony. Various essays for exhibition catalogs published by the Provincetown Art Association and Museum including: The Beginnings of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 1990; The League at the Cape, 1993; Provincetown Abstract Paintings, 1915-1950, 1994; New York-Provincetown: A 50s Connection, 1994. Professor of art and art history at Purdue University and a founding member of Long Point Gallery, Vevers has participated in, researched and chronicled much of Provincetown's art colony history.

FURTHER WALKING

Egan, Leona Rust. Provincetown Theater. A Walking Tour of Historic Theater Sites. Cape Cod Pilgrim Memorial Assn. 1996.

Provincetown Historical Association

- Walking tour No. 1: The Center of Provincetown, 1982.
- Walking Tour No. 2. Provincetown East End, 1989, reprinted
- Walking Tour No. 3. Provincetown West End, 1984.

Most of the publications listed are available at the Museum Store of the Provincetown Art Association and Museum

8.95

PROVINCETOWN: THE ART COLONY

A Chronology and Guide

Nyla Ahrens

