



Hazel Hawthorne Werner, retired author, grande dame of Provincetown, owns the shack

named Euphoria and hikes to it barefoot across the sands, as she has done for 50 years.

## Hazel Hawthorne Werner

Hazel was born October 24, 1901, in Middleborough, MA. Her father was a teacher and high school principal before becoming superintendent of schools in Middleborough. He died when Hazel was 12, a loss that affected her deeply. Her mother, Martha Esther Mills Hawthorne, lived to be 94. Hazel was a cousin of Charles Hawthorne, the painter, and a descendent of Nathaniel Hawthorne. She had one brother, Roger, who died many years ago.

She married a man named Celian Ufford, who was a Harvard graduate and a Unitarian minister. They had five children by the time Hazel was 27. Her oldest daughter, Jane, died in 1982 at the age of 62. She had been married to Al Avellar, who started the Dolphin fleet of whale-watch boats. Her youngest daughter, Sally, died last June at the age of 71. There are two surviving daughters, Nancy Peters, 74, who lives in Chatham, and Margaret Brown, 77, of Long Beach, CA. There was also a son, John, who is no longer living. All of Hazel's children have suffered to some degree from the same rare degenerative condition which has been gradually eroding her own physical capacities for at least the last 50 years. Hazel has 22 grandchildren.

The Uffords were divorced about 1930, and two of the children, Margaret and John, went to live with their father in California. Hazel was left to care for the other three. She married Morris R. Werner of New York City in the early 1930's. He was the author of 16 books of nonfiction, and wrote for various newspapers and magazines. They spent winters in New York, and Hazel spent her summers in Provincetown, settling here year round when her husband died in 1981. She lived in a converted garage up in the woods off Howland Street, which she rented from Sonny Tasha, until 1990, when she became too disabled to live on her own.

Hazel wrote two novels. *Salt House* was published in 1934, and *Three Women* in 1938. The first is a story, only slightly fictionalized, about a group of dissolute young artists and writers splitting time between New York City and the dunes of Cape Cod. The second takes place on the Cape during the Civil War. Hazel also published five stories in The New Yorker during the 1930's and 1940's. She met and befriended some of the greatest writers of the century, and is responsible for bringing a good many of them to Provincetown.

Hazel fell in love with the dunes landscape on the back shore upon her first visit here about 1920. She purchased her first dunes shack, *Thalassa*, in 1936 for \$50 from Louis Silva, a local Coast Guardsman who had built it. She bought a second one in 1943, which she named *Euphoria*, from a woman from Brookline. Aside from spending a great deal of time in them herself, Hazel has rented time in one or the other of her shacks to hundreds of people over the years, glad to share the wonders of dunes living to any who wanted to try it. For the past dozen years, her two shacks have been lovingly maintained and managed, with her permission, by the Peaked Hill Trust, an organization which has advocated for the preservation and continued use of the remaining shacks. The fate of hers will be in the hands of the Park Service upon her death.

Hazel has lived all but the last few years of her life on her own terms, with little regard for the conventions or prevailing moral code of her times. She loved the company of creative and intelligent people, with a well known preference for men. She was charming, quick-witted, and loved to laugh. She loved to cook and was good at it. She loved to have fun. She was also a passionate environmentalist long before the term was invented, and has been an active supporter throughout her life of causes, candidates, and organizations whose ideals she believed in.

Dan Towler, Provincetown  
February 4, 2000



*Text and photographs by William Oscar Johnson*

## Provincetown's dunes: a love story

*A magical stretch of wild beach, a part of Cape Cod National Seashore and of literary history, is still home to a lingering few*

The shack is armored with gray shingles, rippled and rubbed smooth by the grinding sandy wind. It is only about 11 feet square, a stubborn little box set on posts on a sand dune. It shudders in the stiff summer winds blowing off the Atlantic, but it is sound and the roof does not leak. The inner walls are unfinished lumber, and there is a raw plank floor worn quite silky by sandy bare feet. There is no electricity, no running water; candles and a nickel-plated kerosene lamp light the nights. There is a hand pump at the bottom of a sand dune. The pump water is sweet beyond belief.

The shack is named Euphoria and it looks down in peace on the waters of the Peaked Hill Bars. It is located about a mile or so over the great sand dunes behind Provincetown, on a grand and desolate stretch of Cape Cod known as the Back Side.

All of this—the shack named Euphoria, the magnificent brooding dunes, the tossing green sea, the great swath of untrammled beach—is now part of the Cape Cod National Seashore, a vast, splendid federal park which covers about 27,000 acres along 50 miles of the Cape Cod coast. This is a precious, fragile preserve, carefully protected from the ravages of commerce.

Euphoria is owned by a lovely grande dame of Provincetown named Hazel Hawthorne Werner. She is in her seventies, a novelist who published books and *New Yorker* short stories in the Thirties. She lives now in a vine-cloaked refurbished garage in town, surrounded by books and poetry and works of art by old friends. Hazel's hair is frosty white and her gait is uncertain,

for she is afflicted with an illness that tilts her balance and distorts her vision. Yet, with a worn gray rucksack on her back and a sturdy stick in her hand, Hazel still often makes the long walk across the sand from Provincetown to Euphoria. It is more than 50 years now that she has been taking that hike, and she recalls her earliest days there with a beatific smile and a quavery happy voice: "When I was a young girl I would walk into town for parties in the evenings and sometimes I would stay so late that I slept on the wharf by the old sail loft. When the sun began to rise, I would walk home. There are always large pools of sweet water in the dunes, cool and no deeper than your hand. I remember many mornings, returning from town, when I would see such a pool and I would strip off my clothes and roll its full length. I felt that I had washed off the sins and foolishness of the town."

Hazel went seeking her first shack after she had dreamed in New York of a small hut perched on a cliff above the ocean; she convinced her first husband to walk the coast of Cape Cod until they found something like it: "We carried a blanket and slept on the sand," she recalls. "We walked until we were near Provincetown. Then I saw Agnes O'Neill, Eugene O'Neill's second wife, walking into town from Peaked Hill. I had known her in New York in 1918 and when I told her of our search, Agnes said that we must go to the Coast Guard station above the beach and ask the skipper if there was a spare shack. You see, the men out there had a lot of extra time and would hammer together huts out of driftwood for their wives and families, or for a little extra income from renting them out. My shack was there, almost as I had dreamed it, of course. We rented it for \$12 a month."

That first shack was not Euphoria; it disintegrated years ago. Euphoria was actually built in the Thirties, and Hazel also owns another shack half a mile up the beach. There are perhaps a dozen shacks remaining on the dunes now, and they will be extinct quite soon. The National Seashore authorities have an agreement with most owners that lets them use their shacks as long as they live. When the owners die, the park rangers will perhaps burn the shacks or bulldoze them down. "We do not know," said Hazel. "Maybe the rangers will merely board them up and leave them standing on the dunes like shrines."

Nothing is still and nothing is permanent in the dunes. The sea and the wind and the sand are constantly moving. Some dunes "march" as much as 15 feet a year, and perhaps it is this eternal restlessness that gives the dunes the odd feeling of being someone

*Mr. Johnson of Sports Illustrated described the life of women and children in the new China in the August 1974 issue of SMITHSONIAN.*



Howard Mitcham, deaf since childhood, still shouts his poetry into the ocean wind.

look at that yellow carpet from the poverty grass blooms . . . there's a bearberry bush . . . look at the goldenrod . . . at the tree swallows . . . at the sand dollars . . . at the dusty miller leaves. . . ."

Later, he speaks more quietly: "I used to know the poets and painters around Provincetown. They always saw the dunes and the sea on the *big* scale. They liked the panorama. But *I* see the detail in the dunes. I love every gawddam *little* thing."

It has been years now, decades, since any ship ran aground on the Peaked Hill Bars. Yet there is still evidence of disaster on the beach below Euphoria—here and there a wooden keel, bleached now and smooth, or the dark brown rusted boiler plates of some lost ship, lying stark as some bit of modern sculpture on a smooth floor of sand. Off across the sand and scrub brush beyond the shack stands a lonely wooden yardarm. Once, 60 years ago or more, it was a practice target for men of the U.S. Life-Saving Service (later, the U.S. Coast Guard) who used it to sharpen their prowess at firing rescue lines from shore to wallowing ship. There is also an abandoned boathouse there with yawning, haunted doors and windows. This is all that

is left of the heroes and heroics which once were common on the beach off the Peaked Hill Bars. Indeed, as steam-powered ships replaced sailing vessels, the fearsome bars lost their reputation as the Ocean Graveyard. The Life-Saving Station on Peaked Hill was abandoned and, in the 1920s, the dunes of the Province Lands came to be inhabited mainly by a different breed of men—esthetes and escapists.

At one point Eugene O'Neill moved into the station and wrote some of his finest dramas there, including *Anna Christie*. Hazel Werner recalled: "Eugene was a swimmer and I saw him many days stroking off the beach. I would wave sometimes and he would wave back. He had a smile that was brilliant, so happy, when he was swimming. It was a smile you never saw when he was on land."

For a couple of summers in the Twenties, O'Neill rented the station to his friend Edmund Wilson. Brilliant though he was with a pen, Wilson was a bumbler at the less exalted pursuits of the dunes. Once, when the hand pump broke down, Wilson shaved himself with ginger ale for several days before someone came to fix it. On one memorable summer afternoon, Wilson sat up on his dune watching anxiously as three exhausted swimmers were pulled onto the beach by Coast Guardsmen. When the three half-dead forms at last lay wheezing on the beach, Wilson dashed down to do what he could to help. He brought with him the only things he could conceive of, to cheer up the victims: a box of crackers and a jar of anchovy paste.

Another literary celebrity of the dunes was Harry Kemp, the tramp poet who lived most of his life in Provincetown. There is a street there named for him. "Harry was a bore," says Hazel Werner. "He used to put down some bit of doggerel, and he would pound on people's doors at midnight, shouting his lines and crying out, 'Hear that? I've just written the greatest sonnet since Shakespeare.' We would have to calm him down and send him home. I never thought of Harry Kemp as a first-rate poet, although he was widely known as a jolly drunk."

#### *Fur in the oatmeal, a glove in the stew*

Harry Kemp was as renowned for his careless personal hygiene as he was for his drunken poetry. He once hung a fur coat high on a hook in his shack and left it there for the entire summer. In the fall, when he wanted the coat, he was astonished to find that the fur had fallen out and only the skin remained. He was even more baffled trying to figure out where the fallen fur had gone—until he discovered that his sack of oatmeal was directly under the coat. He assumed, and gave no further thought to it, that he had probably eaten the fur with the oatmeal during the summer.

## *Provincetown and the dunes*

Harry Kemp's stew was infamous, too, for he kept a pot boiling constantly, replenishing it from time to time. One day, Harry finally got to the bottom of the pot and, to the anguish of a visitor, he pulled a limp and bedraggled item out of the stew and cried out with delight that it was a glove—the very glove he had used to handle the kerosene for his lamps. "Thank God!" he said. "I never knew where I lost it."

All manner of escapists have populated the dunes. There was once a pair of lovers who built separate shacks upon adjacent peaks to keep their affair a secret, but then put up a mutual privy between which they named the Delphic Oracle. There was a fellow who flew down from Boston with his mother-in-law, strode purposefully to the beach from the airport, and there joyously stripped off his clothes, bundled them up and marched off nude, arm-in-arm with his mother-in-law, to his shack where he wore nothing at all during his entire stay except for a straw hat.

Howard Mitcham is a flamboyant, shaggy fellow with a barrel torso that has grown a bit rounder than mere portliness. His ruddy puffed cheeks and his tangled halo of gray curls make him look a little like a children's book illustration of Old Mother West Wind. Howard Mitcham is 58, a sometime columnist for the *Provincetown Advocate*, once a painter, a locally celebrated chef, formerly a promising poet and novelist who recalls with pride that he once took a creative writing course at LSU in which his teacher was Robert Penn Warren and two classmates were Robert Lowell and Jean Stafford.

Mitcham appeared at the shack Euphoria one dazzling windy afternoon. He stood at the rim of the dune and glared across the sand toward town, toward the slim gray gingerbread chimney of the Pilgrim's Monument which juts above the hills.

Howard Mitcham began to bellow—an oddly flat

and inflectionless sound. His words were buttered with a thick southern accent. Howard Mitcham is deaf as a sea clam and he has heard no sound since he was a little boy. The last spoken words to register in his mind were uttered in the slow drawling syllables of little black children he played with in Louisiana. Thus, Howard Mitcham still drawls, too.

So he was shouting across the dunes and he couldn't himself hear what he said. "They are shrinkin'," he roared. He shook his fist. "They are vanishin.' They are disappearin' as we watch 'em."

He hurried back into the shack to avoid the tragic sight of the diminishing dunes and gratefully consumed some vodka. He seemed momentarily calmed and he gazed briefly at the plain plank table.

"Nohman Mailah wrote some of his best stuff right on those boahds!" He paused, then said, "This whole National Seashoah should be forbidden to everyone 'ceptin' ahtists and writahs and poets! The National Seashoah saved this land from pirates. No doubt!"

Hazel Werner remembers a poignant scene with Howard. "We were walking slowly through the dunes late one afternoon and there was a beautiful sunset. We were identifying plants and blossoms as we strolled along. Then Mitcham stopped. He looked about and turned to me and shouted, 'I s'pose the birds must be singin' now, huh? The birds must be singin' all 'round us.' I nodded. Mitcham was silent for a moment, then he said, 'Must be mighty nice! Mighty nice! Birds singin' must be mighty nice!' Then he walked on. There was no bitterness or self-pity in his voice."

This time Howard Mitcham drank a little more vodka, then shook a finger and said, "Don't fohget! It's pronounced Peak-ed, not Peakd Hill Bahs!" He gazed out the windows, now rattling in the wind. Then he rushed out of the shack, up on a dune and stood facing the foaming shoals below. "I wrote this poem 24 yeahs ago! Twenty-foah yeahs ago when I was a young man! I named it *Peaked Hill Bahs!*" And in his drawling monotone he began to shout into the evening wind:

*On the full of the moon  
And the Spring tides rise,  
The ghosts of drowned mariners  
Play ring around the rosy  
With fearful clatter and groan  
On the foaming Peaked Hill Bars.  
On the wane of the moon  
And the neap tides ebb,  
They rest,  
At peace with their nervous bones.*

The shack Euphoria stands alone amid sand and sky, already a shrine to people of the dunes.





*Board of Selectmen*  
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May 25, 2000

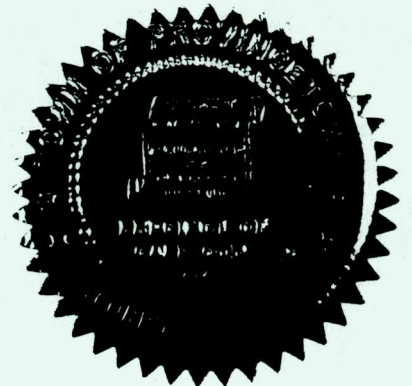
Hazel H. Werner

The Board of Selectmen are pleased to recognize Hazel H. Werner as the oldest citizen in the Town of Provincetown.

We acknowledge her many accomplishments. We are proud to have her as a member of our community and honored to present to her the BOSTON POST CANE.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Steele-Jeffers, Chairman  
Board of Selectmen





talk about the dune shacks—more often than Eugene O'Neill, more often than Harry Kemp (Poet of the Dunes), more often than Norman Mailer. Mrs. Werner is eighty-seven, and lives in what she calls a supershack—a former two-car garage in a wooded, almost rural pocket of Provincetown. She doesn't get out to her other shacks much anymore—she has two, Euphoria and Thalassa—and if you ask her how she came to own them she says, "Well, I don't know whether I own them or not." This is a reflection not on Mrs. Werner's memory (she says it does let her down sometimes) but on a confused and controversial state of affairs between the shack owners and the Cape Cod National Seashore, which since 1961 has owned the sand the shacks are sitting on. "The Seashore—that's Seashore with a capital 'S'—wants to dump the shacks, to destroy them," Mrs. Werner says. "They say they're 'undistinguished' structures—and they are." This summer, however, the Massachusetts Historical Commission voted unanimously to recommend that the shacks be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and if they are listed it will save them from destruction by the Seashore, if not from the sea itself.

### Dune Shacks

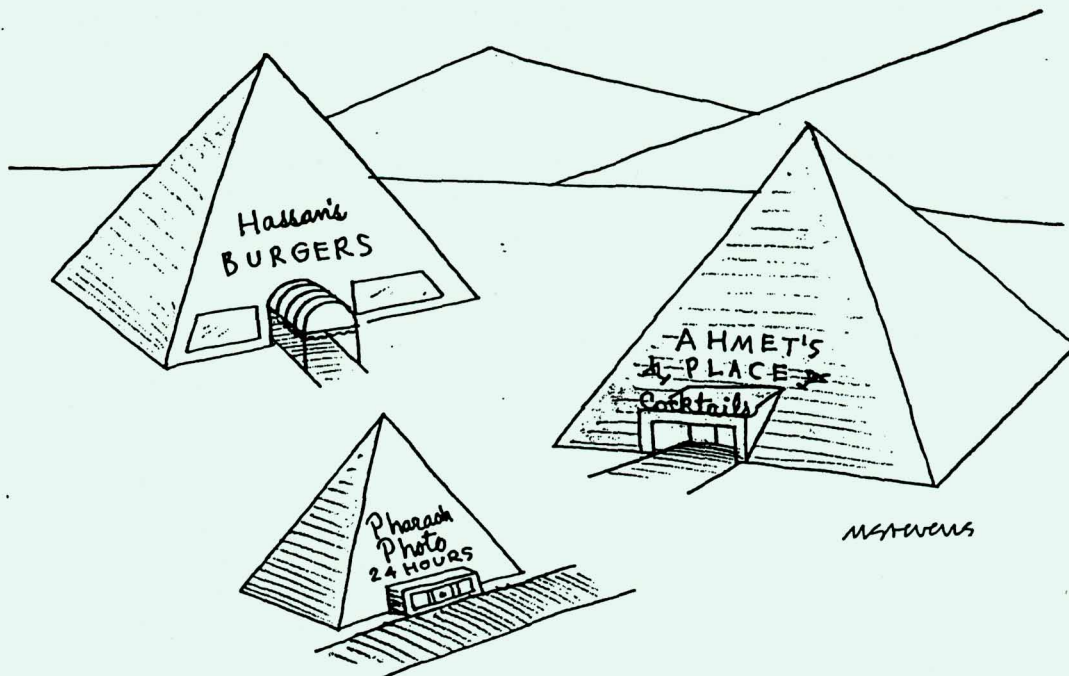
**H**AZEL HAWTHORNE WERNER is the name that comes up most often when people in Provincetown

Mrs. Werner first came to the dunes in the early twenties. She remembers that it was hot in New York that summer, and that her husband was at a

marine school in England, learning to sail. "I stayed in New York and worked," she told us not long ago. "I hated the heat in the streets and in the tiny room I had. I had a vision of a place by the ocean, where you could take a blanket and sleep on the beach and there was nobody around—maybe a small cottage." When her husband got back, she told him she'd had this vision, and they set out walking along Cape Cod Bay in search of her cottage. They got all the way to Snail Road, the road leading into the dunes in Provincetown. "I turned my head, and there was Agnes Boulton with a suitcase," Mrs. Werner went on. Agnes Boulton was Eugene O'Neill's wife. "Hazel, I thought you were in New York," she said. So I said, 'I had a vision,' and I told her about the cottage. 'Go to the Coast Guard station and find Mr. Mayo, the skipper,' Agnes said—they called him the skipper—and tell him you want to rent the little shack we had. Gene's father died. I'm going in to town to join him.' She meant New London, I suppose. Gene left the Cape for good a few years after that. He never came back."

For years, Hazel Werner and her children (~~she had five~~) spent the summer in one shack or another. Some of the shacks, including O'Neill's, have long since fallen into the water. "I bought Thalassa from a Coast Guard man in town. I have the papers," Mrs.

Werner said, gesturing toward a desk against one wall of her supershack. Kitchen appliances were lined up against one adjacent wall, and a bed with a wicker frame took up another wall. Chairs were ranged in front of the remaining one. Mrs. Werner, in a black dress with a black scarf at her throat, was in a wheelchair. "Euphoria I bought from a woman in Boston before the Second World War," she added. "Cora was her name. She had a sweetheart in the Coast Guard. I used to go up on her steps and sit, and one day I thought, Instead of just sitting



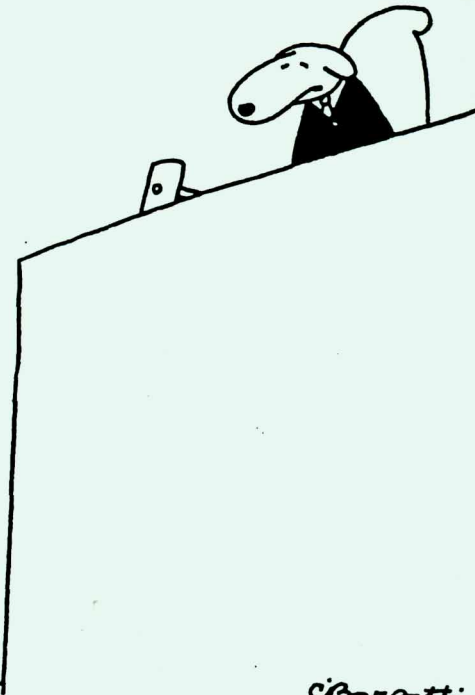
The Lesser Pyramids

on the steps I'll write to Cora and buy the place. She was sick to dying of it. A man was haunting her on the beach. I got it for two hundred dollars. There were barrels inside full of stones and shells—souvenirs of her Coast Guard sweetheart. She had me send them to her in Boston."

There are eighteen shacks on the dunes right now, only one of which is fully deeded. The Seashore does not recognize squatters' rights, and most of the shack owners (a few are still in litigation) eventually came to terms with the Seashore, signing leases for twenty-five years or life. When the leases are up, the Seashore intends to return the shore to its natural state. A few years ago, because it was getting increasingly difficult for Mrs. Werner to maintain her shacks, some friends who had rented from her in the past founded the Peaked Hill Trust. A nonprofit organization, the trust maintains Euphoria, Thalassa, and one other shack, belonging to Boris Margo, an eighty-six-year-old artist, and it hopes to persuade the Seashore that managing and maintaining the shacks is preferable to tearing them down. (The trust is named for the Peaked Hill Bars, which are sandbars off the coast—underwater dunes, in effect. The first shacks were built by the Massachusetts Humane Society—early coast guards—as shelters for sailors who were shipwrecked on the Peaked Hill Bars.)

Mrs. Werner had some mementos of the shacks at hand: a windowpane from Thalassa which was so scoured by sand during a nor'easter in March of '84 that it looks like frosted glass; a typewritten note from her nephew Tom ("Seen from Thalassa, the world around is like nothing you have seen before—its chaos now in perfect order"); a Polaroid of a pump outside Thalassa; and a map that she used to give people who were going out to Euphoria for the first time. The map showed the horizon as a straight line intersected in a few places by parabolas (the dunes), and a childlike sun, moon, and star were lined up in the sky. To the left were Euphoria and Race Point, the Highlands and Truro to the right.

The day before, we'd taken a walk on the dunes in search of the shacks, and we told Mrs. Werner what we'd seen. We entered the dunes from a fire road off Route 6, across from Snail Road. The first shack we saw, off to the right, after about a half-mile trek,



C. Barcott

*"As unbelievable as it may seem to you today,  
this court was once a puppy, too."*

was not a shack at all but a substantial brown house, with what looked like laundry flapping on a line. Then, straight ahead, we saw a flat-topped shack of weathered gray shingles, and climbed up toward it. It had a pump behind it, and an outhouse and a birdhouse, and a collection of rose hips drying in the sun. "That's Boris's shack," Mrs. Werner told us. "That one was nearest to O'Neill's." We didn't peek in the windows or knock or holler, since it was obvious that whoever came out here wasn't expecting company. We turned around and, from behind Boris's shack, saw what we guessed was Euphoria and several other shacks, fragile and inconspicuous among the dunes—certainly no more "unnatural" a sight than the mushrooms sprouting from the sand among the beach grass, scrub oaks, scrub pines, and cranberries.

After our conversation with Mrs. Werner, we returned to the dunes, and, beyond some ruins that she had marked on the map—ruins of an old Coast Guard station—we found Thalassa. We knew Thalassa from its pump, which had a big wooden tub under it that Mrs. Werner said her workman used to wash his feet in. And we knew why it was called Thalassa from the view when we got to the top of the

dune it's built on. *Thalassa* is Greek for "sea."



Photocopied from FROM THE PEAKED HILLS  
A Collection of Writing and Drawing  
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*Kathy Shorr*

INTERVIEW WITH HAZEL HAWTHORNE WERNER

Born in 1901, Hazel Hawthorne Werner lives now in a cottage that feels as if it's in the dunes, though it's two miles from the ocean in the Provincetown woods, without a view of even the harbor. But it has the feeling of being somewhere far from town, somewhere wild and tangled, overgrown. The cottage, once a two car garage, is light and airy with high ceilings and giant windows. It's covered with vines, and a huge *rosa rugosa* bush grows outside the front door.

Her books, *The Salt House* and *Three Women*, were published in the 1930s. She wrote regularly for several magazines including *The New Yorker*. And she lived in the middle of a circle of artists and writers (many of whom spent time in her shacks) notably Edmund Wilson, e.e. cummings, Susan Glaspell, Jig Cook, John Dos Passos, Clare Leighton, Jack Kerouac, Edwin Dickinson, and Franz Kline.

Hazel first came to Provincetown around 1918, and for many, many years spent her summers here and winters in New York. She came here year round after the death of her second husband in 1981.

Though she suffers now from double vision, Hazel has eyes that are bright and full of energy. She still reads regularly, following her finger across the page to keep her on the right line. She says she's planning to write a third novel now.

Q. I love the story about how you first found the shacks—that you first dreamed them.

A. That was when I was married to my first husband. I was quite young and he got a job in Massachusetts for the summer taking some young men in a sailing vessel to England. And I was left in New York. I had posed in the Village as a model. It was terribly hot, and I kept thinking about a sand bank and a shack at the top, over the ocean, and I would feel cooler. When my husband came back at the first of August, I said, "All this summer I've been dreaming of a sand bank and the ocean. It's been a horribly hot place here. Let's go up and look for it."

We had very little money, so we walked all the way from Portsmouth down the coast. We had no luck at all. Everywhere we asked, in Plymouth and so on, nobody had seen any such dream as I had. We had a blanket and slept on the beaches as we came down, and the blanket was all bitten every night because of the sandhoppers.

When we arrived in Provincetown, we were terribly tired and discouraged. I had lived in Provincetown and worked here when I was about 18, I think, a little while after the Provincetown Players first started.

There was no Holiday Inn in those days, and as we went by Snail Road, I happened to turn my head towards the dunes. I just had been out there once, to take care of Mary Heaton Vorse's children on a picnic, so I remembered that little road. And here was coming Agnes O'Neill, with a little tiny suitcase, and she said, "Hazel!" (She had known me in New York.) "What are you doing here?" and I said, "I have a dream about spending the summer here." She said, "That's a great idea. Eugene and I are living in a lifesaving station at the end

of this road out on the dunes, close to the sea. We've been there all summer. Gene's father died a few days ago, and we have to attend to the funeral and all that in New Haven. In the meantime, you walk straight out Snail Road. Go to the Coast Guard and tell Mr. Mayo who's the skipper there that Gene and I said you were to have one of those little cottages beside the Coast Guard Station." They were for rent, I think it was \$12 a month.

Q. That must have been in the early 1920s. And then you built your shacks in the '30s?

A. I didn't build any of them. I bought Euphoria from a woman who loved the dunes. This was just before the Second World War. There was a man she fell in love with where Boris [Margo's] shack is now. He lived in that shack and she lived in Euphoria. He joined the war and she didn't want to stay out there any more. She had a job in Boston in a hospital. It [the shack] was vacant for several summers. I wrote her a letter—I was living in a small shack, quite a distance, which is now Thalassa.

When the woman in Boston got my letter, she said she would sell it to me for the price it was built. Also she collected stones from the beach and shells and so forth, and she asked me to please send those to her. There were big barrels of them. They meant a great deal to her. And so I did it.

Q. So you had been staying in Thalassa then, but you didn't own it?

A. I asked someone from the Coast Guard if I could rent it from him. There was another little shack beside it. The Coast Guard's wife had stayed in there, and a family. Then it fell into the sea. But the Coast Guards dragged it out of the water and they hauled it up the hill, and built another shack close to it.

The Coast Guard[sman] wrote me a letter in New York and said he was going to another station at Hull. So I bought it [Thalassa] off him. I paid him \$75.

Q. When you think about living there, are there certain days that flash in your mind?

A. Oh, I did a lot of writing there. I published two books. One was about the dunes, *The Salt House*.

Q. It's very easy to write out there.

A. Yes, but you've got to be sure your papers aren't blown away. The windows were open in Thalassa one day and I was writing a story about an Italian critic. We were very good friends, very good friends. But I wasn't going to have it published because I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

I went into town and when I came back, one of the windows had blown open. Everything blew away. A few pages were left. There was something uncanny about it. I didn't want him to see it.

Oh—I forgot, this is important. I kept a journal out there all those years.

Q. I'd like to print along with this interview something that you wrote.

A. I'm sensitive about my *Salt House*, because much of it was about my life, and people in town were scandalized. (Laughs) The bookstore wouldn't sell the book.

Q. When I first met you, you said with no hesitation, "Oh yes, I like Euphoria the best." Why?

A. Oh, the feeling in there. Of course there's a lot more space [than in Thalassa]. But all my best reminiscences from recent years have been being very happy in Euphoria. A lot of people who stay out there use the word 'magic.'

I have had people stay out there who couldn't stand the place. One man, a publisher from New York, stayed the night in Thalassa. In the morning early he appeared [at Euphoria]. He said, "Can you get me out of here right away?" I said, "Why? No one ever says that." And he told me a story about how the sailors who were drowned came ashore. They were on the pieces of wood that belonged to the Coast Guard [Station]. All that wood was saved and used in this floor [Thalassa's]. "I could just see those dead men who were dragged to shore from the storm, and I couldn't sleep all night," he said. "Can you call somebody?" I said, "I can't—there's no telephone out here. You'll have to walk." And he said, "All right, I'll pack my bag."

Q. I always used to picture people in the 1930s living out there and going from shack to shack, drinking whiskey late at night and visiting. When I told that to someone he shook his head and said, "Oh, no, everybody who went out there would go to be left alone—"

A. (Laughs) That's right. Once there was a man who was a mayor from one of the Midwestern towns, a liberal. He and his wife rented the shack next to Thalassa. There were storms; even on the beach, we left them alone. There was a black sky, heavy rain the next day and the next day, and the fourth day of rain the mayor and his wife stumbled into our shack and said, "We can't stand it any longer. We just had to see somebody else!" (Laughs) And they spent the afternoon with us.

Q. I hear stories about parties out there.

A. Oh, I had two wonderful dinner parties out there.

Q. Two—they were the only ones you ever had out there?

A. (Nods) Uh huh. (Laughs) One, Franz Kline came out for, but he wasn't going to stay. But he arrived with a case of beer. It was a dinner party for 11 people. Joe Hawthorne and his wife were there. When the liquor was opened he [Kline] changed his mind. All the guests had to pile into Thalassa and crawl up to the table. The Hawthornes said it was the best party and the best food they'd ever had.

Q. So you must have spent a lot of time out there by yourself?

A. Yes. That's why I loved it. Often when my children were a little older and they said they'd like to come out, I put them in Thalassa. They were perfectly happy to stay there. They were quite mischievous. They could go to town; they belonged to some kind of club. They'd walk in for tennis, and meet some young people. And I would be alone

all the time in the other shack.

- Q. I read that sometimes when you stayed out in the dunes, you'd come into town for a party or something and spend the night on the wharf down by the sailing boats till morning and then walk back out when the sun would come up.
- A. I don't remember the timing of going out. I used to walk out late at night to the shack, but I had to come in early because I was taking care of some children. I had to get them breakfast. They had a new baby in the family and I was taking care of it. The mother was in the hospital and her husband couldn't take care of a new baby. And they thought I was *crazy* because I was so determined to go at night out to the back shore (laughs) and come back early...but it made sense to me.





WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 9, 1957



## flotsam and jetsam

By HAZEL HAWTHORNE

Three months away from Provincetown, and just back. When I am away people I meet—cab-drivers, railroad porters, clerks in stores making out send sales slips—on hearing the words "Cape Cod" often ask the same question and often get the same answer. "What's it like now on the Cape?" and I tell them, "Quiet." I like to see how they take it; it gives one an idea of what they want to get out of life. Some pull long faces, and say, "It's nice in summer, though." Others say, "I envy you, going back," and they have a look, for a moment, of imagining how it is and liking the image.

It is amazing how many people on the mainland know of our region. In even the most casual encounters when traveling a reference to it brings a brightening recognition almost every time. Let's face it: our region is famously attractive. It is more than that, it is alluring. Let us, therefore, take a sober pause in this season of resolutions, and make a civic resolve to keep it alluring, in the best sense of the word.

I thought much upon this theme as I came home. In Virginia were blocks of split-levels—they don't call them houses any more—crowding upon a manor house of the just proportions of the eighteenth century. I saw a whole village of identical brick apartment houses and not a tree left among them. It looked more like a state prison than a village.

On a corner of the land in Arlington where rises the Lincoln Memorial a ranch-type house is in construction.

In Connecticut I saw a yellow brick mansion high above a river. It looks in style quite like our town's handsome Grace Hall house that is gone. It faces west and the facade must hold the afternoon light even after twilight, the way rivers often do, and the sea. Behind it are split-levels creeping up the hill.

We must keep our old houses if we can, on Cape Cod. We cannot duplicate their look of composure. And we must keep our hills and our trees. No artificial construction can ever equal a hill or a tree.

The split-levels will come, and that's all right, too, provided the old natural and architectural beauties aren't bulldozed away at the same time. There's still room for all. The homeward journey began in Virginia where there was only a spit of snow. Beyond Old Saybrook it begins to show like sprinkles of sugar in the hollows. In Rhode Island it is merely a dusting but the ice appears to be thicker. Trees rise bare as ships' masts out of swamp hummocks but they are more forlorn than masts. Branches of shrubbery are naked as needles. Pines are sallow green. Something is lacking, though this is country near the sea, isn't it the Cape?

After Providence, and going north (because there's no bus to Hyannis on weekends) snow lies in drifts, snow that is snow, the real right white stuff. A passenger for Route 128 puts on his rubbers, then a sweater and woolly scarf under his overcoat. I observe that the white birches in the woods are bowed down with the weight of snow. I think of the question that bothered Sir Ferdinand Gorges in England long ago when he considered staking a journey to New England: "Is it a climate habitable to white men?"

I think, too, of an Italian friend to whom I quoted this question, and who with a shiver stated, "It is not."

It is habitable to me, for one, and I am going home.

In Boston I change trains. The sunset burns low under a heavy sky. City lights soon thin out and we go into darkness, country darkness. The Canal is deep purple, almost black, as we cross it. Amber lights alongside its banks are contained but do not shine in this heavy night. I am too far forward to hear the stations called and they can be identified only by lighted segments of platform.

Hyannis. I am going home. After Orleans I am the only passenger on the bus. Driver Gillies says it's too bad I've missed the lights on the monument. Nevertheless Provincetown looks bright as a city and I remember that on summer night it shines across the water like Venice.

Next morning my pretty neighbor, Nancy Kelly, calls a welcome from her kitchen door. "How long you staying?" he asks, and I say, "I hope forever."



## flotsam and jetsam

BY HAZEL HAWTHORNE

I became acquainted last week with our town's oldest resident, Mrs. Florence Waldin, on the eve of her birthday.

That she is very old is not the only fact of her existence, as unfortunately it often is with the aging. She wants to go on being useful. Her hands were moist from washing dishes when she came in the room. "We're not slave-drivers," said her grandson, Dick Baumgartner, "it's just that you can't keep her down." Up to a few years ago, he said, she tried to "con" him into lugging coal or mowing the lawn by starting the jobs herself. Now frail and kept indoors she keeps busy with family mending, with particular devotion to the patches on her two great grandsons' dungaree knees.

She helps the boys with their homework; this, and the desire to go on acquiring knowledge herself keep her alert. When I asked what she read she told me Churchill's history, often the New York Times, Life, all the Book of the Month Club selections, and mysteries. "I wait till they've all gone to bed," she said, and pointing to the television set, "Can't read when that Thing is on."

We spoke of winter weather and she recalled notable storms of the earlier Cape. She had walked out, with a girl companion, over Snail Road to the Back Shore after the Portland disaster. "We saw tubs of butter, broken doors and splinters of furniture all around, and we picked up a baby's shoe."

"But I've told these things all before," she finished, and smiled. "There isn't much to tell when one is 99."

The item last week about the confusion among the seasons of late is corroborated in a letter from a daughter, Nancy Peters, in Philadelphia. "Who knows what spring is when the crocus and daffs start pushing up in December and the daffs are already five inches high?"

Here's a letter for the column from Helen Bishop, who will come back early in March to take over her Flotsam and Jetsam again. No comment necessary: the letter tells all.

"Any one from Provincetown coming to Fort Lauderdale for the first time won't feel lonesome! So many of our 'natives' are here, you feel at home right away. There's one part of the beach where a group meets every day under a special clump of palm trees—the Cyril Patricks, the Justin Avellars, the Tommy O'Donnells, Marjorie Adams, and Myrick and Franklin Young. You also meet Ing and Charley Mayo, Barbara and Al Avellar, and on Saturdays and Sundays, when there's no school, the two inseparables, Dennis Jones and Stormy Mayo. The boys, by the way, are the fastest runners in their school, thus boosting Provincetown's athletic reputation! Mr. and Mrs. Charles Mayo, Sr., are also in Fort Lauderdale; also Mr. and Mrs. Edward Davis. I may be seen, covered up to the eyes, in the shade of a palm tree, trying not to get sunburned; being one of those miserable creatures who turn bright red and puff up!

"Bessie Enos is here, also the Tony 'Fall River' family. The Van Arsdale's have been visiting Betty's sister. Jim and Hannah Martindale are here on their boat, the "Hannah", and Anne and George Packard are living aboard the "Tonya" which belongs to Anne's parents, Dr. and Mrs. Locke. Irma and Kurt Ruckstahl live near us, and we see a lot of them. Fort Lauderdale is a very beautiful place—we all like it vastly more than any other place down here. We thought Miami Beach a horror, and Palm Beach seems to be dying!

"I read the Beacon eagerly every week, and now am looking forward to getting home. See you all in a couple of weeks."

## Mr. Kemp's Provincetown

LOVE AMONG THE CAPE-ENDERS, by Harry Kemp. Macaulay Company.

Harry Kemp probably thought his novel a beautiful betrayal of The Provincetown Players, as an artist is permitted to betray, but he has only succeeded in a vulgar post-mortem. The figures of the famous group are romanticized beyond recognition, and their complicated, colorful proportions completely ignored in favor of a flat, heavy-handed treatment. It is true that the dramatist of the sea is rendered—almost wistfully, one notes—as a rigorously stern worker, and the bacchanalian and sprightly inspirations characteristic of the beloved *régisseur*, as, for instance, "If the rock had only landed on the Pilgrims, instead of the Pilgrims landing on the rock", are accurately set down. There is not a glint of the true story. So much for the Players.

The rest of the novel is about Stephen Groton, a poet. As Mr. Kemp is himself a poet, with a noisy but sincere reverence for poetry for poetry's sake, it is unforgivable in him to use words so badly, to blunt his sentences, and especially to twist and hyphenate adverbs until they are misshapen from the torture. "Edenically", for example—a perversion of the clean simple word, Eden! In *Tramping On Life* Harry Kemp was powerful, now he is only awkward.

The weakness of this poet, Stephen Groton, is very tenderly revealed. There is the inevitable Greek demi-god look about him, and there is this sequence: "The one thrilling kiss given him had begotten the sonnet. A magazine sent him a check for twenty-five for that poem." Kiss to sonnet to check. This cycle is sometimes broken in upon with a seduction, or a smash on somebody's jaw. One sees what Mr. Kemp did not intend, that Stephen has stumbled so desperately after a dramatized idea of life that he has left completely behind him the often slowly developing, true drama of things. Thus he bears only a very clumsy cross.

## Owen Johnson's New Novel

THE COMING OF THE AMAZONS, by Owen Johnson. New York, Longmans, Green and Company.

The year 2181 proves to be a woman's world, where "Man's place is in the Club". John Bogardus gets into it from the year 1931, through a highly scientific hibernation in a Frigidrome. There he finds his fellows paraded as *débutantes*, gaining their little advantages through coquetry, and allowed to play football only because it keeps them in good breeding trim. It is explained to John that over-population had bred wars for so long that women had to take things in hand; they had created pretty country round there, even though they never did get to be very good at mathematics.

The really charming feature of the new scheme of things is the way servants are handled. They are hypnotized, and each morning, instead of orders, they are given hypnotic suggestions. That is the neatest trick of the week, now or later.

The heroine is "bald as Socrates, strong as Achilles, and totally devoid of a sense of humor." If that doesn't appeal to you, who are thus projected into the year 2181, you can do what the hero did, give a warning of the danger of feminine progress, and crawl into a refrigerator to escape.

—Hazel Hawthorne

DECEMBER · 1931

WAR PAINT AND ROUGE, by Robert V. Chambers. D. Appleton and Company.

Mr. Chambers has seventy novels in his name, and proud of it. This late is one of his historical series, and concerns the days when men were strong silent soldiers and women were wenches—in short, the days of the French and Indian Wars. And so there are the spies and the sour faces of Puritan saucy wits, and Indians and war, ably supported by Mr. Chambers' historically truthful findings. The reader can trust the accuracy of his facts from small things like chilled flip, the gun emplacements, redoubts and trenches of the fortress of Louisbourg. His paper people are, of course, another matter.

He has that trick of juxtaposition of words which sets off old-fashioned things prettily, as calico blocks are ranged on quilts. It is not reality, not even the reality of times past, but it is neat enough, and makes a picture book, which, incidentally, is touched up with plenty of wholesome, winsome sex.

—H. J.

