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CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT FOR DUNE SHACKS OF PEAKED HILL BARS HISTORIC DISTRICT

CAPE COD NATIONAL SEASHORE



CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT FOR DUNE SHACKS OF PEAKED HILL BARS HISTORIC DISTRICT

CAPE COD NATIONAL SEASHORE
PROVINCETOWN AND TRURO, MASSACHUSETTS

*“They seemed to have come from
the stars:*

*Like voyagers on the moon.
Down craters silvery-dusk
They drifted, dune over dune.
The beach plum blossoms, all-
white,*

*With never a glimpse of green.
Like little ghosts in the dark
Beleaguered the moon-washed
scene.”*

Harry Kemp, Poet of the Dunes

SITE HISTORY

EXISTING CONDITIONS

ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

TREATMENT

Prepared by
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Cover: Aerial photograph looking west, Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District, October 2002. The Braaten shack is in the foreground. Further west is Werner (Thalassa) close to the outer edge of the foredune; Chanel, Fearing, and Fowler shacks on the far left; and the Kemp and Werner (Euphoria) shacks in the distance (Image by Pandion, Cape 1/13, Cape Cod NS Archives).

Title Page: Beach plum blossoms with Margo/Gelb shack in the distance, May 2011, Olmsted Center.

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FOREWORD

Along the windswept backshore of Truro and Provincetown lies a remote place that has captured the hearts and minds of all who have spent time there. Long before the designation of this area as the Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District, people were attracted to its remarkable landscape for inspiration, contemplation, and solitude. Today, this 1900-acre historic district, with its 18 dune shacks and associated landscape are preserved within Cape Cod National Seashore. The district is recognized by the National Register of Historic Places for its significance in the areas of art, literature, entertainment and recreation, architecture, and archeology for the period of 1920 to 1991.

The dunes and the shacks serve as a cultural link between the rugged coastal setting of the Atlantic Ocean on one side, and the bustling summer community of Provincetown on the other. Perhaps nowhere else in the National Seashore can one be so physically close, yet so intellectually and emotionally distant from development as is the case with the Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District.

The district has been well documented through historic structure and ethnographic reports and National Register documentation. Additionally, artists, writers, and people with enduring associations have left a legacy of paintings, poetry, journals, photographs, and oral histories that provide a context for understanding what this special place has meant to people over time.

This cultural landscape report captures the setting within which the dune shacks reside. It chronicles the changing dune landscape—a vast area of wind-blown sand, peaks, and valleys, and its diversity of vegetation. It describes the sand roads and footpaths that provide access to and between the shacks, and the outhouses, decks, outdoor seating and cooking areas, and birdhouses that provide a distinct domestic setting.

The National Seashore's 1961 legislation and the 1998 General Management state the dual goal of identifying all of the Park's significant cultural landscapes and historic structures and nominating them to the National Register of Historic Places; and also the importance of preserving the way of life or "culture" established and maintained by the people who have lived on the Outer Cape. The critical information from this report, along with other documentation, will help ensure that the historic district's landscape, buildings, and traditions are maintained in perpetuity for future generations to understand, appreciate, and enjoy.

George E. Price, Jr.
Superintendent
Cape Cod National Seashore

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This report was a collaborative effort of the staff at the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation, Cape Cod National Seashore, and the Northeast Historic Architecture Program. At the Olmsted Center, Emily Donaldson authored the introduction, site history, and analysis chapters. Gretchen Hilyard prepared the existing conditions chapter and gathered historical information on the dune shacks. Margie Coffin Brown served as project manager, authored the treatment chapter, and contributed to the existing conditions and analysis chapters. Michael Commisso assisted with the documentation of existing conditions and prepared a Cultural Landscape Inventory for the historic district in 2008. Laura Roberts and Rumika Chaudhry prepared the period plans and site maps, Stephen Carrola assisted with the narrative, and Christopher Stevens assisted with the documentation of existing conditions and the collection of baseline information about the shacks. Director Robert Page provided overall project guidance.

At Cape Cod National Seashore, Bill Burke, Park Historian and Compliance Coordinator for Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, served as park lead, coordinated site visits, and assisted with gathering historical documentation. Curator Hope Morrill provided historic photographs and documents from the park archives. Geographic Information Specialist Mark Adams provided map data layers and assisted with the delineation of the boundary of the historic district. Chief of Interpretation and Cultural Resources Sue Moynihan and Superintendent George Price provided overall project guidance.

Staff from the National Park Service Northeast regional cultural resource programs also assisted with the report. At the Historic Architecture Program, Judith Quinn Sullivan, Architectural Historian, shared historic images and documents gathered as part of the concurrent study, *Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic Structure Report, Cape Cod National Seashore*. Chuck Smythe, Ethnographer provided review comments. Paul Weinbaum, former Lead Historian and Elizabeth Igleheart, National Register Coordinator reviewed draft reports and refined the statement of significance.

Several members of the Provincetown community and greater area provided invaluable assistance in locating historic documents and images. Several paintings in the report are from the collection at the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, where Chris McCarthy, Director and James Zimmerman, Photo Archivist assisted with the selection of landscape paintings of the dunes and

dune shacks. Additional dune paintings are from the art collection at the Provincetown Library. Special thanks to Peter Clemons and Marianne Benson, David and Connie Armstrong, Nathaniel and Mildred Champlin, Marcia and David Adams, and Geraldine Hill Fraser who contributed narrative histories and images from their family collections. Also in Provincetown, Laurel Guadazno, Education and Program Manager at the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum, assisted with the use of the historic photograph, postcard, and map collection. Josephine Del Deo and Doug Johnstone assisted with archival research at the Provincetown History Project Archives. Paul Gavin, Provincetown Assessor, assisted with use of the map collection at the town hall.

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Information gathered from shack occupants as part of Dr. Robert Wolfe's 2005 study, *Dwelling in the Dunes: Traditional Use of the Dune Shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars Historic District* was very helpful in documenting the individual shack histories. Three concurrent studies also informed this report: the draft "Dune Shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars Historic Structure Report" prepared by Judith Quinn Sullivan; the final draft of the National Register Documentation for "Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District" prepared by Jenny Fields Scofield, Kristen Heitert, Virginia Adams, and Stephen Olausen; and the "Dune Shack Historic District Preservation and Use Plan/Environmental Assessment/Assessment of Effect" prepared by Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc., Cape Cod National Seashore staff, and National Park Service regional staff.

INTRODUCTION

A cultural landscape report is the primary document used by the National Park Service to guide the treatment and management of a cultural landscape. This Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) for Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District documents the physical development of the landscape and provides guidance and recommendations on preserving the landscape characteristics and features that help convey the significance of the historic district. This information will in turn assist the National Park Service with the long term stewardship, management, and interpretation of the landscape associated with the dune shacks. The report includes treatment guidance for the district to address issues associated with the shifting sand dunes, access and circulation, changes in vegetation, viewsheds, erosion, land use, and maintenance requirements.

PROJECT SETTING

The dune shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars are located on the tip of the Outer Cape, along the “back shore” of Provincetown and Truro in Barnstable County, Massachusetts (Figures 1 and 2). The dune shacks are rustic, small, and weathered buildings, many of which were originally associated with the old Peaked Hill Bars

Life-Saving Station and its stewards. Transient in character, the shacks are constructed on pilings in order to allow their occasional relocation, raising, or lowering in the ever shifting dune environment. The severity of the climate in this area accelerates the need for ongoing maintenance of the shacks and the management of sand around buildings.



Figure 1. Aerial photograph looking west of the Dune Shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars Historic District (Collection of the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum, hereafter Pilgrim Monument Archives).

A unique and fragile resource, the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places determined the dune shacks and setting eligible for listing as a historic district in 1989. National Register documentation, prepared in 2011, recognizes the significance of the district in the areas of art, literature, entertainment and recreation, architecture, and archeology for the period of 1920 to 1991.¹ The Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District contains eighteen extant dune shacks, which are owned and managed by the National Park Service. One privately owned shack is located outside the district boundary.

Both dunes and shacks serve as a cultural link between the rugged coastal setting of the Atlantic Ocean on one side and the bustling summer community of Provincetown on the other. After the establishment of the National Seashore in 1961, most of the dunes of Provincetown and Truro and the shacks built upon them became the property of the National Park Service. The eastern and western

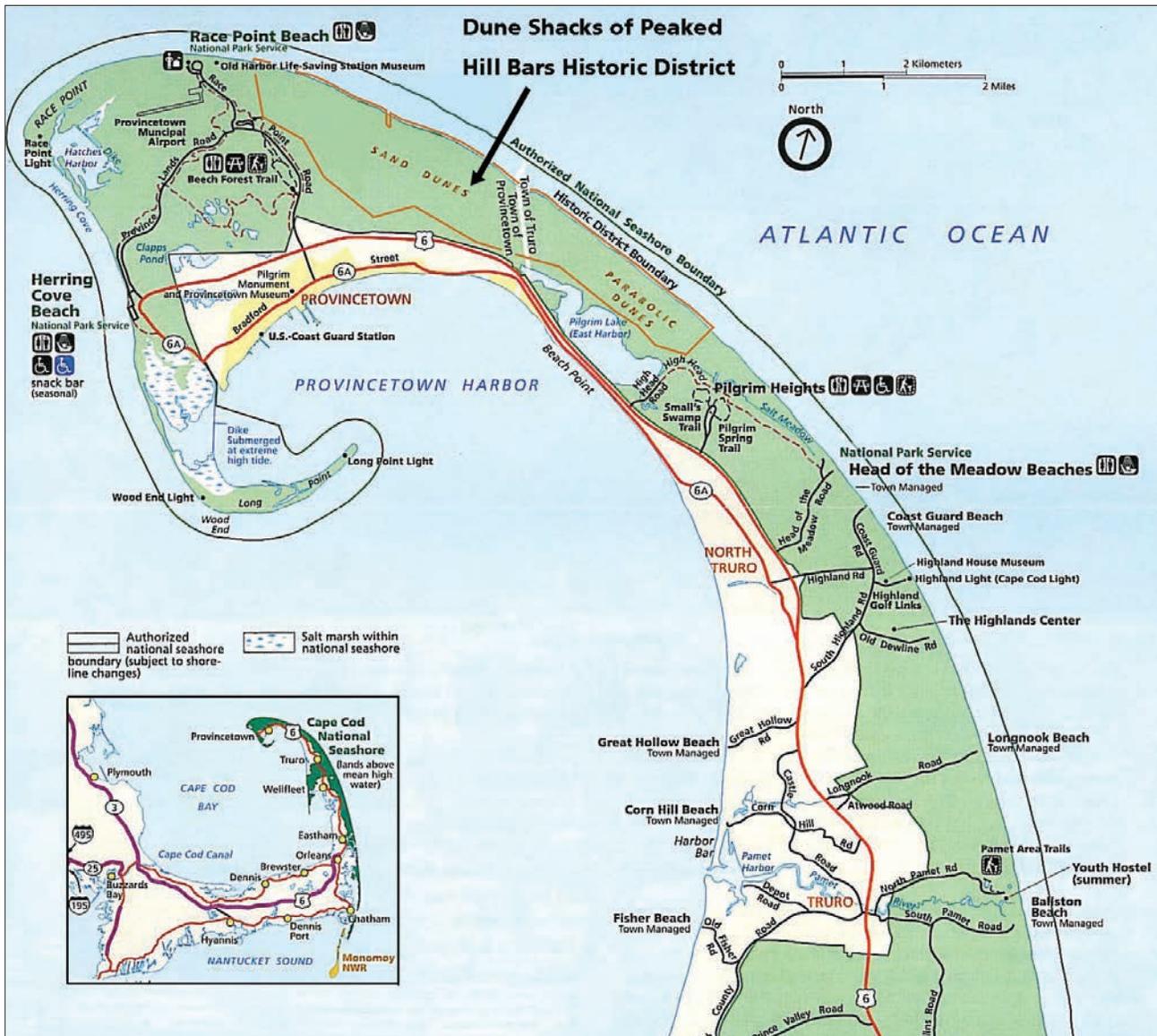


Figure 2. Location of the Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District (Cape Cod National Seashore Brochure). The dune shacks are located in the areas labeled “sand dunes” and “parabolic dunes” in Provincetown and Truro.

ends of the district were previously state-owned as part of the Pilgrim Spring State Park and Province Lands State Reservation. The dune shacks are predominantly located on the foredune and inner dune along the outer beach (Figures 2 and 3). Some shacks were demolished under federal ownership prior to the historic district designation due to their deteriorating condition, as well as the park's opinion, prior to the National Register Determination of Eligibility, that they were not significant. Today, buildings owned by the National Park Service continue to be used as summer dwellings through reservations of use and occupancy, agreements, permits, and leases.

The boundary of the Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District encompasses roughly 1,960 acres, including the high tide line of the shore to the north; the High Head Road the east; the crest of the upland dune to the south, termed the outer dune ridge; and the viewshed line to the west of the western cluster of shacks (see Figures 2 and 3).² This boundary includes both the dune shacks and the cultural landscape which surrounds them, as well as associated views as seen from the structures. Due to the shifting form and character of the dunes, these district limits are a close approximation and may move to various degrees in some locations. If necessary, the boundary line should be adjusted in order to encompass the dune shacks as well as the extent of the landscape to the crest of the outer dune ridge, wherever that may occur. The town of Provincetown is located to the southwest, the town of Truro to the southeast, the Atlantic Ocean to the north, and Race Point to the west. The district can be seen from the Provincetown Monument, the Province Lands Visitor Center, and from U.S. Route 6 looking north across Pilgrim Lake/East Harbor, where the highest dunes form the southern edge of the district.

METHODOLOGY AND SCOPE OF WORK

The cultural landscape report documents the physical history of the landscape, identifies significant defining landscape characteristics and features, and provides treatment guidance to the park, lessees, cooperators, and permittees. A companion report, "Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic Structure Report,"

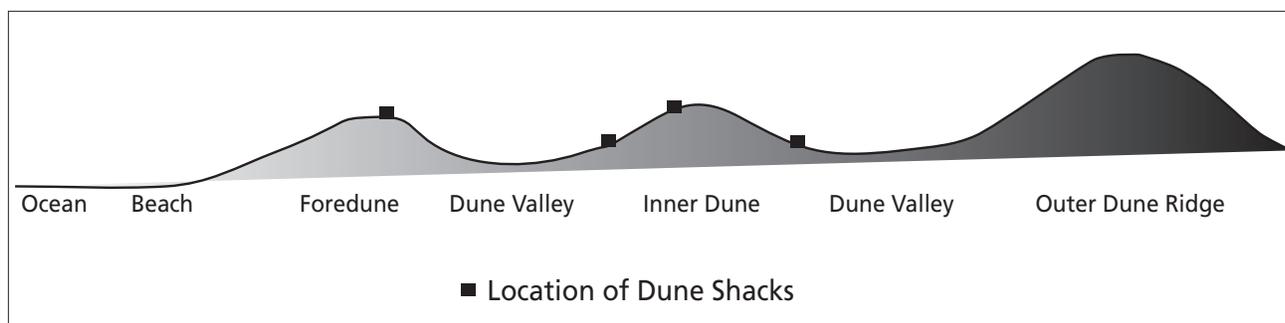


Figure 3. Dune morphology and location of the dune shacks on the foredune, inner dune, and dune valleys.

provides detail on the history, condition, and significance of the individual structures in the district. When appropriate, these two documents reference each other and use consistent nomenclature for the dune shack names.

The dune shack names are based on the occupants who historically used the shack for the longest period of time, rather than the original owners or builders. Further distinctions are included in parentheses. In some cases where dwellers overlapped or had extended associations, multiple names are ascribed. These names correspond with the contributing resources listed in the National Register documentation, “Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District,” completed in 2011.

The CLR follows the guidelines established by the National Park Service *Management Policies* (2006), *Director’s Order 28: Cultural Resource Management* (1998), *NPS 28: Cultural Resource Management Guideline* (1997), *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (1996), and *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports: Contents, Process, and Techniques* (1998). The project team gathered historical information from the park archives and administrative files; the National Archives and Records Administration, Northeast Region located in Waltham, Massachusetts; and local historical repositories in Provincetown, Truro, and Wellfleet.

TERMINOLOGY

Some of the terminology commonly used in describing the Outer Cape requires clarification. Outer Cape is synonymous with Lower Cape, and the former term is used throughout this report unless specifically citing source material. The back shore is roughly defined as the dune area running along the east side of Cape Cod’s outer arm, from Provincetown all the way to Monomoy in Chatham. The northern and westernmost portion of this area in Provincetown is called the Province Lands, some of which was once part of a state-owned reservation. At times it is also called the Provincelands. The Province Lands Hook is an area of marshes and dunes which composes the very northern tip of Cape Cod, formed over thousands of years by drifting sands, waves, and changing sea levels.³

A portion of this coast is marked by the Peaked Hill Bars, or a group of sand bars standing just off the coast of the back shore that reach around the east end of Provincetown to Truro. This name is also used to describe the shore area nearby, where the Peaked Hill used to stand on the location of the Margo/Gelb shack and close to the Kemp shack. Once the area’s tallest barrier dune, the hill gradually blew away in the mid-twentieth century, a process most likely exacerbated by circulation routes over the dune.⁴

Numerous terms relate to the morphology of the dunes. The string of dunes closest to the beach is referred to as the foredune, while the next string or ridgeline inland is called the inner dune. Most of the shacks are located on the leeward slope of the foredune, in the valley between the foredune and inner dune, or they perch high on the side of the inner dune (see Figure 3). The inland and upland southern boundary of the historic district is referred to as the outer dune ridge. Some of the upland dunes are parabolic dunes, which are horseshoe-shaped mountains of sand shaped by the prevailing northwest wind. These mountains of sand rely upon a delicate balance between their two sides: the lee slope or slip face which collects blown sand, and the windward slope which shelters a fairly flat sand area and is gradually blown back in the direction of the wind.⁵ A string of parabolic dunes lies north of East Harbor, which was formerly known as Pilgrim Lake or Inner Harbor.

SITE HISTORY OVERVIEW

The site history describes key developments, physical relationships, patterns, features, and important individuals and events relating to the changes that have taken place in the landscape. Specific characteristics documented include circulation systems, views, vegetation and cultivated areas, structures and utilities, building remnants, and small-scale features.

The authors draw from multiple primary and secondary sources including historic images and maps, aerial photographs, first hand accounts of dune shack dwellers, and correspondence. These accounts include Mary Heaton Vorse's *Time and the Town: A Provincetown Chronicle*; Josephine Del Deo's *The Dune Cottages of the Peaked Hill Bars: A Survey* and her *Compass Grass Anthology: A Collection of Provincetown Portraits*; as well as Clive Driver's *Looking Back*. The site history also builds on previous studies published by the National Park Service including *Historic Cultural Land Use Study of Lower Cape Cod* and *Dwelling in the Dunes*. Images were gathered from the park archives, the albums of dune shack occupants, online repositories, and the collection at the Provincetown Heritage Museum archives. Despite the wealth of information about the shacks, there are few records from the original dune dwellers that document their decisions on where to locate the shacks in the dunes.

Across its history, the landscape of the Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District has been recognized as both unique and fragile. Native Americans used the back shore as a place to hunt and collect berries but did not actively cultivate its thin layer of fertile topsoil. One of the first Governors of Plymouth Colony, Thomas Prence, set aside the area for public use and put a tax on the fish caught there. Soon local fishermen were regularly using the back shore to dry their large

catches of fish, which swiftly began depleting the dunes of their meager vegetation. Escalating erosion issues subsequently resulted in Truro's measures against public grazing of animals, combined with requirements for annual planting of vegetation in the dunes. Yet despite these moves to preserve the landscape, the region's soil continued to erode. The stresses of the Revolutionary War aggravated the area's problems as British barricades blocked fishing and the land was strained to its furthest limits of production. By 1820 the towns of Truro and Provincetown were cleared of their woodlands, even as the fishing industry boomed. Between 1790 and 1837 Provincetown's fleet more than quadrupled, from a total of twenty fishing vessels to ninety-eight.

After over a century of exploitation the back shore had become a virtual desert of sand and wind, dramatically depicted by Henry David Thoreau in his 1865 account of hiking down the arm of the Cape. The landscape that he observed—an expanse only occasionally interrupted by a halfway house for shipwrecked sailors—underwent substantial alteration in the years that followed.

With the construction of the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station in 1872, the empty reaches of the Peaked Hill Bars area became an established site for human habitation. In these early years dune inhabitants reflected the creative pursuit of survival and contentment typical of the Outer Cape more broadly. Surfmen and their families were joined by casual hunters and fishermen. Starting in the early twentieth century, artists and other seekers of leisure began dwelling in the dunes as well.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century tourism thrived in the United States, and Cape Cod became a destination for diverse characters from around the world. With the completion of U.S. Route 6 in 1926, automobiles poured into Provincetown to absorb the quaint atmosphere of a fishing town with an unusual wealth of cultural activity. Among those drawn to the dunes in the first decades of the twentieth century were famous artists, writers and thinkers including Harry Kemp, John Reed, Mabel Dodge, Eugene O'Neill, Susan Glaspell, and Mary Heaton Vorse. Even as the local population dwindled with the fading maritime industry in Provincetown, tourism and art flourished. Eugene O'Neill established a summer home in the old Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station in 1919, and others soon followed him into the dunes.

Thus from the early twentieth century onward, a landscape recognized for centuries as desolate and fragile also became loved for its distinct character. Windswept structures popped up in the once deserted sands behind the foredune of the back shore, at first in association with the Life-Saving and Coast Guard Stations and later independently. Throughout the twentieth century these buildings have borne an ongoing struggle against the relentlessly moving dunes. The dune shacks themselves, most of which have been moved and many of which were built to sustain relocation, are a product of this harsh and dynamic environment.

From these shacks dune dwellers could enjoy views of the ocean or the Pilgrim Monument, or simply absorb the soft, uniquely rolling shapes of the surrounding dunes. They took advantage of fishing, hunting, and berry foraging opportunities on the back shore and collected building materials and natural curiosities from the beach. Some grew their own small gardens or built playground areas for their children, while others wandered the dunes, reveling in the surprisingly diverse array of wildlife found there. Many used their time on the back shore for contemplation, creative work, socializing, or pure relaxation.

Those fascinated by the dunes of Provincetown and Truro in the 1920s and subsequent years ultimately helped draw public attention to the unique dune landscape. In the mid-twentieth century, many of those who were attracted to the dunes joined political leaders and citizens across the Cape in efforts to establish Cape Cod National Seashore as a means to protect the Outer Cape from over-development. Preservation was recognized as a national priority, and in 1961 this area was delineated within the administrative boundary of the Cape Cod National Seashore. Dune shack dwellers, however, were concerned about federal acquisition of the dune shacks and formed the Great Beach Cottage Owners Association in 1962 to unite against National Park Service ownership. Faced with an adversarial relationship from the outset, the park negotiated acquisitions and lease agreements individually rather than as a class action. With long term lease agreements in place, most dune dwellers continued to maintain the structures and their surrounding environment. Relocations continued due to the constantly changing landscape. In some cases, shacks were lifted due to burying sands, or built on top off, as was done for the Chanel shack in 1976.

Dune shack preservationists formed additional organizations in the 1980s and 90s. The Peaked Hill Trust, founded in 1985, assumed an active role in the management and maintenance of the shacks. Most dwellers also supported the listing of the dune shacks on the National Register and supported the preparation of a Determination of Eligibility for a historic district in 1989. Most recently, the Peaked Hill Trust took a lead role in the reconstruction of the Malkin/Ofsevit shack in 1991 after the shack was destroyed by an accidental fire. Additional non-profit organizations formed in the 1990s assumed stewardship roles for the shacks including the Provincetown Community Compact, established in 1993, and the Outer Cape Artist in Residency Consortium founded in 1995.

SUMMARY OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

A team of landscape architects, architects, and historians from the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation documented the existing condition of the cultural landscape of the Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District in 2006 and 2007, with additional documentation up through September 2011. Staff from the

Cape Cod National Seashore and Art's Dune Tours of Provincetown provided transportation throughout the dunes of Provincetown and Truro. Individual shacks were reached by hiking along the beach and on various footpaths and vehicle trails throughout the area, providing the recorders with a firsthand experience of the circulation routes utilized throughout the district.

Between the site visits, the amount of change in the landscape and the ongoing challenge of managing the moving sand around the shacks was clearly evident. Set in a vast area of wind-blown sand, the peaks and valleys of the dune landscape are covered with a diversity of vegetation while each shack has a distinct domestic setting that typically includes an outhouse, well, fuel storage, solar and/or wind-power, decks, outdoor seating and cooking areas, footpaths, benches, woodpiles, birdhouses, planters, signs, fencing, and sculptures made of found objects.

The project team used Global Positioning System (GPS) units in the field to document the boundary of the historic district. The team also used a current set of Geographic Information System (GIS) map layers to document shack locations and associated features. An overlay of aerial photographs from 1932, 1938, 1947, 1960, and 1991 aided in the identification of former sites of moved or removed shacks and outbuildings. In the future, GPS and GIS technology will be useful in documenting changes in the dune landscape.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

The historic district was determined eligible by the Keeper of the National Register in 1989. The documentation was completed in 2011 for listing under National Register Criteria A, B, C, and D for the district's association with the historic development of American art and literature; association with the development of recreation on Cape Cod; architectural representation of a rare and fragile property type; association with the productive literary career of the poet, Harry Kemp, and its potential to yield prehistoric and historic archeological resources. The documentation recognizes the cultural landscape as the linchpin of its significance and lists the Peaked Hill Bars landscape as a contributing site. As part of the analysis chapter, this report articulates in greater detail the characteristics and features within the landscape that make the district significant. The period of significance, updated by the concurrent National Register documentation, spans from 1920 to 1991, encompassing the playwright Eugene O'Neill's residence in the dunes and the oldest extant shacks in the district, through the designation of the Cape Cod National Seashore, and up to the reconstruction of the Malkin/Ofsevit shack in 1991. This period includes the residence of poet Harry Kemp in the Kemp shack from the 1930s until his death in 1960.

While certain properties are not typically considered eligible for the National Register—including moved properties and reconstructed buildings—the dune shacks meet criteria considerations that allow them to be eligible. Several of the shacks have been moved away from the eroding shoreline but retain their setting within the dune landscape and remain within the proximity of other dune shacks in the historic district. For this reason they meet the requirements of National Register Criteria Consideration B, having preserved the architectural values, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association with the dune landscape.

Though several buildings were lost due to deterioration and erosion prior to historic district designation, the historic district retains the seven aspects defined by the National Register: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The shacks are located in the heart of the harsh, wind-swept dune landscape, far removed from the densely developed community of Provincetown. Unprotected from the natural elements, particularly wind and sun, the shacks retain their physical relationship of small clusters and isolated outposts, set at distances of 200 feet or more from each other, predominantly one-story in height and located on the sides and hollows of the dunes. The design, materials, and workmanship of the shacks is simple and vernacular, reflecting a close relationship with the surrounding landscape. Most shacks have decks, outdoor seating areas, and outhouses; utilize a network of footpaths; use recycled or found materials; and apply ingenious and simple strategies for managing the movement of sand, water, waste, heat, and electricity. The landscape is still devoid of forest cover, though National Park Service stabilization efforts and a reduction of the road and trail network in the dunes have resulted in an increase in woody vegetation. Through the efforts of the Peaked Hill Trust, Provincetown Community Compact, Outer Cape Artist in Residency Consortium, and some individual dune dwellers, there remains a strong association with artists, writers, and the Provincetown community.

SUMMARY OF TREATMENT GUIDELINES

The treatment chapter reviews the management directives outlined in *Forging a Collaborative Future: General Management Plan, Cape Cod National Seashore* (1998) and the recent draft “Dune Shack Historic District Preservation and Use Plan/Environmental Assessment/Assessment of Effect” (2011). The report then describes treatment issues, and presents treatment recommendations in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes* (1996).

A key management objective stated in the General Management Plan is to “encourage a commitment to the stewardship of the buildings, places, activities, and artifacts of Cape Cod that best exemplify its traditional character, and

conserve them to ensure their continuing contribution to the culture of Cape Cod, in collaboration with local communities.”⁶ The treatment approach recommended for the historic district is rehabilitation, which will allow the park to perpetuate use of the dune shacks as remote, inspirational retreats while managing the shacks and circulation system in a harsh, ever changing environment. The treatment principles focus on the protection of natural systems within the historic district and the continued access to, use, and maintenance of the existing shacks in their current isolated settings or cluster arrangements.

Specific treatment recommendations respond to existing or potential threats to the historic integrity of the district, including the management of shifting dunes and erosion, the protection of viewsheds, the removal of non-native invasive vegetation, the use of wood and native natural materials rather than plastic for erosion control, and the preservation of small-scale landscape features associated with the domestic setting of each shack. In combination with previous chapters, this documentation supports park consultation responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act as well as the National Environmental Policy Act.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 Elizabeth Igleheart, NPS NER National Register Coordinator, “Delineating the boundary of the Dune Shacks of the Peaked Hill Bar Historic District,” (Meeting Notes, Boston, MA: National Park Service, February 4, 2011).
- 3 John M. Zeigler, Sherwood D. Tuttle, Herman J. Tasha and Graham S. Giese, “The Age and Development of the Provincelands Hook, Outer Cape Cod, Massachusetts,” *Limnology and Oceanography* Vol. 10: 298-311, November 1965 (http://aslo.org/lo/toc/vol_10/supplement2/R0298.pdf).
- 4 Robert J. Wolfe, *Dwelling in the Dunes: Traditional Use of the Dune Shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars Historic District, Cape Cod* (Boston, MA: National Park Service, 2005), 19, 145.
- 5 Regina T. Binder, “Comprehensive Conservation Treatment and Management Plan for the Dune Shacks of Provincetown, Massachusetts,” (Columbia University, 1990), 14-6.
- 6 U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Forging a Collaborative Future: General Management Plan, Cape Cod National Seashore* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1998), 18.



CHAPTER 1. SITE HISTORY

This chapter details the history of the Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District by period, from the area's early history to the present. The contact period describes the geological processes that formed the Outer Cape, the use of the area by Paleoindians and later the Pamets, and the arrival of European explorers. The second period, 1620 to 1830, chronicles the period of European settlement and land use patterns, which included widespread harvesting of the Outer Cape's natural resources. These early periods are similar to those presented in the *Historic Cultural Land Use Study of Lower Cape Cod* (1997).

The third period, 1830 to 1919, describes the effects of industrialization on the Outer Cape, most notably the introduction of the railroad, automobiles, and Route 6. On the back shore this period was punctuated by the construction of the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station in 1872 and the subsequent addition of various ancillary structures, some of which became the earliest dune shacks. The fourth period starts in 1919, when playwright Eugene O'Neill took up residence in the decommissioned Old Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station. His move signaled the beginning of dune shack use as a place for entertainment and artistic inspiration rather than the highly regimented responsibilities of a life-saving station. Occupants of the shack included poet Harry Kemp, who first stayed in the dunes in the mid 1920s and thereafter continued to dwell in the dunes until his death in 1960. The fourth period ends in 1961 with the designation of the Cape Cod National Seashore. The fifth period from 1961 to 1991 describes the role of the National Park Service in managing the dune landscape, the formation of local organizations to protect and manage the shacks, and increased tourism. The final period extends from 1991 to present and covers the recent history of the management and preservation of the shacks.

CONTACT PERIOD, PRE-1620

GEOLOGICAL HISTORY

Encompassing the area from Orleans to Provincetown, the Outer Cape was formed by streams of melt-water that drained westward from the South Channel Lobe into Glacial Lake Cape Cod, some 23,000 years ago.¹ This strip of land is a late Wisconsin glacial landform and a surviving fragment of the last great ice age, currently resting on Precambrian and Paleozoic crystalline basement rocks 50 to 275 meters below sea level.² As sea levels rose about 15,000 years ago, marine

Figure 1.0 (above). Tourists exploring the barren dune landscape, 1914 (photo album, Cape Cod NS Archives).

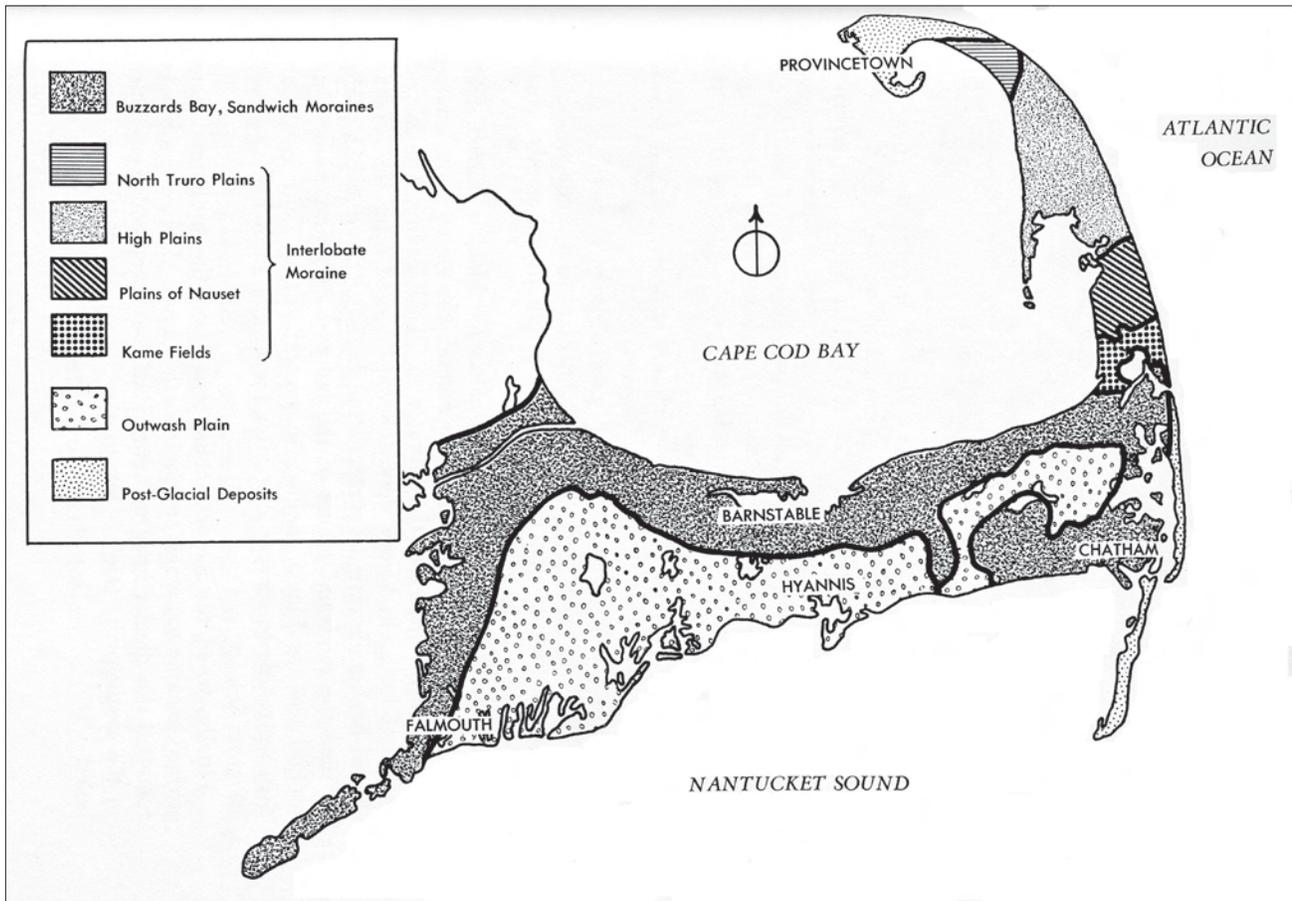
erosion escalated and the area was gradually transformed into outwash plains composed of rocky continental debris.³ In the words of Cape Cod devotee and writer Henry Beston:

Moving down into the sea, later glaciations passed over the old beaches and the fragments of plain, and, stumbling over them, heaped upon these sills their accumulated drift of gravels, sand, and stones.⁴

As the glacier retreated it left the shifting sands of Provincetown behind, an undulating expanse that would remain devoid of any substantial soil buildup or vegetation for thousands of years. Even while the rest of the Cape stabilized under a cover of boreal forest, eroded sediments from the glacial drift travelled northward to create the Province Lands Hook around 6,000 years ago.⁵ This area included the land north and west of High Head and was made up of sandy marine deposits covered with post-glacial deposits of unstabilized dune sands (Figure 1.1). In a process replicated throughout the back shore, the outer reaches of the arm of Cape Cod developed thus:

Waves remove sand from the beach and currents carry it away. Some sand is deposited on the sea floor, while other material is added to landforms like the Provincelands Hook. The wind erodes sand from the unvegetated scarp face, and some of this sediment is deposited on top of the cliffs in wedge-shaped

Figure 1.1. Diagram showing the geological characteristics of Cape Cod. Most of the Outer Beach area is a post-glacial deposit of sand (Chamberlain, 1964, 97).



foredunes. These dunes advance inland as the cliff edge retreats. Fore-dune advance is rapid, and only pioneer plants like beach grass are able to maintain a foothold on them. The wind also shapes the unvegetated parts of the Provincelands into large parabolic dunes.⁶

These dunes existed not only in the Province Lands but to the east and south, in the Peaked Hill Bars area. Giant parabolic mounds of sand continue to be formed and reformed endlessly by the wind, growing to almost 100 feet in height. Indeed, in the shore zones such as the Peaked Hill Bars ocean waves and currents, wind, and sea level rise have been the major agents of change.⁷ Although this area cannot be said to have cliffs, the same process of wear and movement can be witnessed today. Barrier foredunes shelter inner dunes where sediment deposits collect and foster stunted patches of vegetation which strive for some stability in the ever-shifting sand.⁸

The aeolian and marine deposits and other glacial drift material make the dunes highly permeable. Precipitation thus soaks easily through the soil to the water table, which stands just above sea level.⁹ Of this land Henry David Thoreau wrote in the 1850s:

For the first half of the Cape large blocks of stone are found, here and there, mixed with the sand, but for the last thirty miles boulders, or even gravel, are rarely met with. . . Above the sand, if the surface is subjected to agricultural tests, there is found to be a thin layer of soil gradually diminishing from Barnstable to Truro, where it ceases; but there are many holes and rents in this weather-beaten garment not likely to be stitched in time, which reveal the naked flesh of the Cape, and its extremity is completely bare.¹⁰

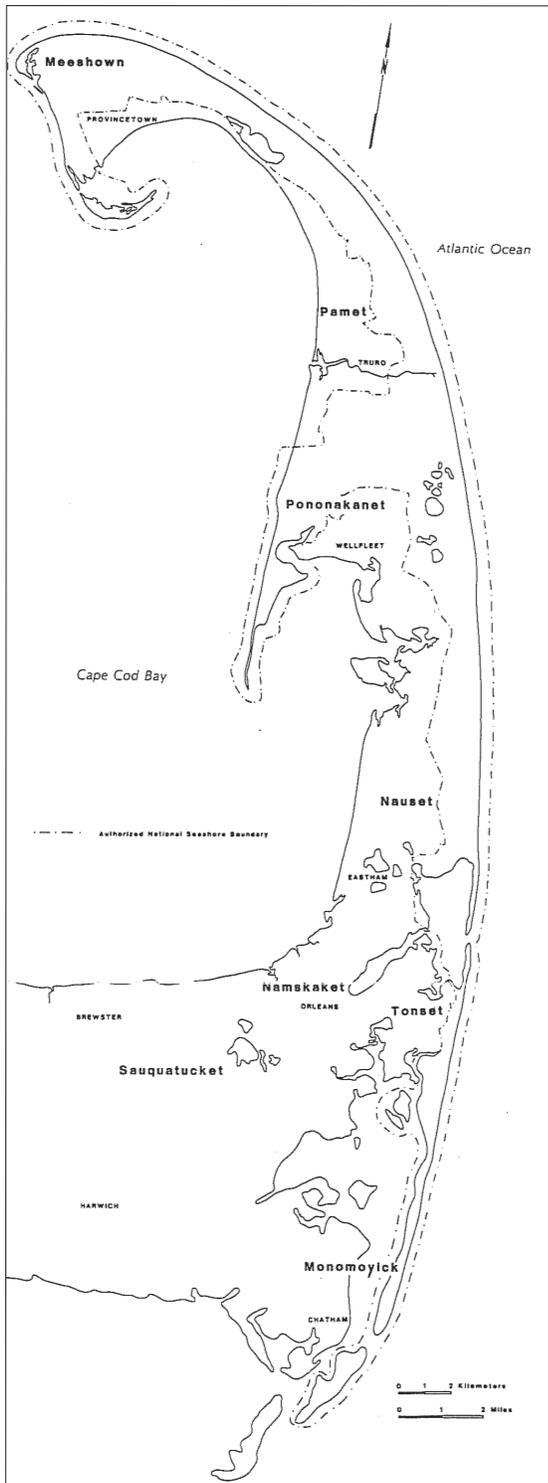
Similar to most of the non-wetland areas of the Outer Cape, the soils of Provincetown and North Truro are classified as Carver coarse sand, loamy sand, or loamy coarse sand which is deep, excessively drained, and acidic.¹¹

NATIVE AMERICANS ON THE BACK SHORE

It is likely that even as the land continued to form, it was utilized and inhabited by humans. The presence of Paleoindians on Cape Cod dates to between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago.¹² Though rising sea levels and severe land erosion has probably destroyed much of the physical evidence for these early inhabitants, the local population appears to have increased during the Early and Middle Archaic Periods, around 6,000 to 8,000 years ago. The oldest pottery and arrowhead remains found on the Cape date to around this period, some 7,700 years ago.¹³ From the subsequent Late Archaic Period, or between 3,000 and 6,000 years ago, two burial sites from the culturally distinct Susquehanna Tradition were found in Eastham and Orleans.¹⁴ Indigenous sites have also been found in the nearby Province Lands.¹⁵

The Outer Cape was historically inhabited by a branch of the Wampanoag federation of tribes known as the Pamets (Figure 1.2).¹⁶ The word “pamet” also referred to the local valleys that extend all the way from the ocean to Cape Cod Bay, whose more fertile soil and shelter from the wind proved optimal for early human settlement.¹⁷ In areas with soil fit for cultivation, the Pamets planted corn (*Zea mays*), squash (*Cucurbita, sp.*), beans (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), and tobacco (*Nicotiana tabacum*), which could then be used for consumption as well as trade

Figure 1.2. Map of Cape Cod with Native American place names (Holmes et al., n.d., 222).



goods.¹⁸ The same inland regions also likely harbored game such as deer, rabbit, and fox, while the shoreline was used for clamming, fishing, and drift whaling.¹⁹ The shoreline teemed seasonally with plovers, sand pipers, gulls, terns, herons, loons, grebes, cormorants, geese, and ducks.²⁰

In the deepest, most sheltered valleys of the dunes the water table is high enough to create small bogs with low nitrogen levels where cranberries (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*), club-mosses (*Lycopodium sp.*), and insect-eating sundews (*Drosera sp.*) grow. The Pamets made their pemmican, a food staple high in energy and easy to store, from a combination of dried cranberries, salted venison, and melted fat.²¹ Cranberries were also used by the Native Americans as a food, fabric dye, and healing agent.²²

Aside from berry picking it is unlikely that the Peaked Hill Bars area ever had much potential for the agricultural practices typical of the Pamets, due to the shallow, exceedingly fragile soil and shifting sand. In many areas of the Outer Cape, Native Americans periodically burned the understory vegetation in order to facilitate agriculture. This practice probably contributed to the establishment and enduring presence of the hardy pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*) throughout the region.²³

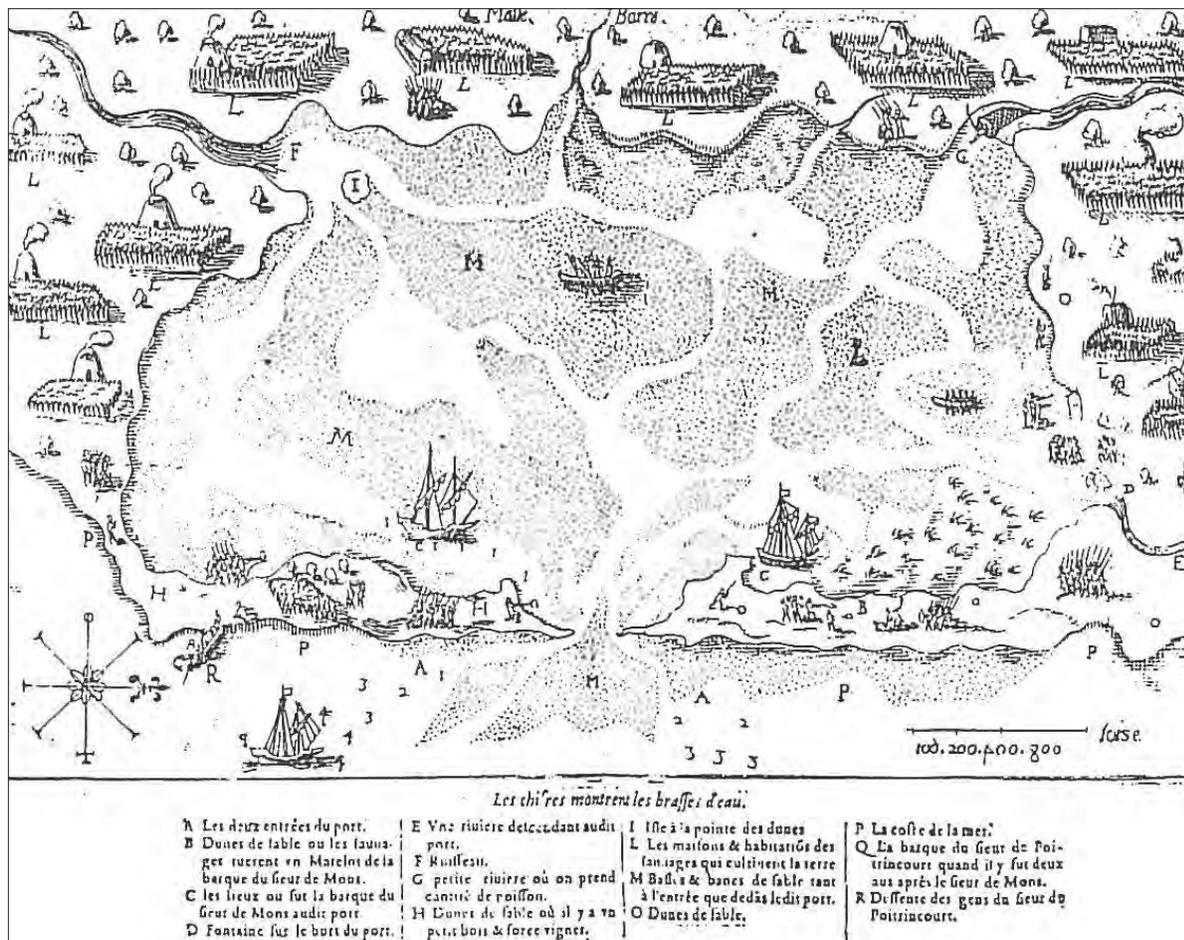
The Pamets were among the first to utilize the unusually diverse environment of the Outer Cape. They would have quickly found the coastal, wetland, and upland resources of the area easily accessible from centrally located living areas.²⁴ Ready access to water was one convenience of the Peaked Hill Bars area, as iron stains still indicate where it stands just a few feet under the surface of the sand.²⁵ Near the height of the area’s use by Native Americans, the Norse may have visited the area. Leif Ericson is said to have visited these shores in 1003 and remarked upon the “long and sandy strands” of land which made up the back shore of Outer Cape Cod, later described as the area between Race Point and the Truro town line.²⁶

EUROPEAN EXPLORATION

In 1602 the British explorer Bartholomew Gosnold named the area Cape Cod, after observing an abundance of these fish in its cold waters. He also had one of the earliest encounters with a Native American in Provincetown Harbor, crossing paths with a young man who wore disks of copper in his ears and may have been staying there only seasonally.²⁷ In 1605 the French explorer Samuel de Champlain called the perilous waters of the Cape's outer shore "Mallebarre" (Figure 1.3).²⁸ Archeological evidence found in nearby Truro indicates intensive settlement of the area around this time, particularly along the shores of Cape Cod bay.²⁹ Visiting the area in 1614, Captain John Smith was the first to make an accurate and detailed map of Cape Cod. The same map later guided the Pilgrims in their investigation of the area.³⁰

On the whole, little is known of how the landscape of the Peaked Hill Bars may have changed during the contact period. At the time of European contact, different pieces of land on the Outer Cape were cleared and cultivated on a rotating basis, which created a landscape of relatively open areas off-set by others with more dense vegetation.³¹ Structures that existed during this period were probably temporary, and akin to the Wampanoag "wigwams" described by the Pilgrims in 1620.³²

Figure 1.3. Samuel de Champlain's map of Nauset Harbor showing the Native American settlements that he encountered, from 1605 (Champlain, 1912 [1605]).



EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT, COLONIAL, AND FEDERAL PERIODS, 1620 TO 1830

FIRST ENCOUNTER AND COLONIAL SETTLEMENT

The dunes of Provincetown and North Truro were likely one of the first landforms spotted by the Pilgrims when they reached Cape Cod in 1620. Their initial encounter with Native Americans, and the same spot where the *Mayflower Compact* was signed, took place on land which would afterwards compose a portion of Provincetown. The Pilgrims found the area fit for fishing mackerel, bass, and cod, but chose to settle across the bay, at Plymouth.³³ Upon exploring the nearby Truro area they found fields cleared by the Wampanoag and a cache of corn around the spot later dubbed Corn Hill. At the time the Pamets of Truro probably did not have concentrated villages, but were instead dispersed across a broad area and cultivated crops on a rotational basis. They gathered quahogs and clams, harvested oysters and scallops, hunted deer, and caught fish in weirs on the coastal flats of the bay.³⁴ At the outset of the seventeenth century, however, this way of life was already disappearing.

In 1629 a British royal patent granted the Plymouth Colony jurisdiction over the land from Cohasset to Narragansett Bay, including all of Cape Cod.³⁵ Before long this area was platted into towns, as settlers in the 1640s spread to the Outer Cape in search of new land for farming.³⁶ In 1654 the Governor of Plymouth Colony, Thomas Prentice, bought a deed for an area including the dunes outside Provincetown from a Native American named Sampson, who claimed ownership of the parcel.³⁷ Thus with the arrival of European inhabitants on the Outer Cape, a landscape originally carpeted with a forest of diverse trees and shrubs rapidly gave way to open fields filled with corn and other crops, where the soil could provide the proper support. The strident clearing methods and intensive agricultural activities required to maintain this new life on the Cape nearly deforested the entire region, causing the limited fertility of its sandy soils to be all but lost.³⁸

In response to the clearly fragile state of the area's natural resources, the Plymouth Colony established the Province Lands area as a fishing reserve, or common public lands for so-called "fishing improvements," in 1654.³⁹ Though the logging of the land itself did not cease until the dunes were entirely deforested, the Province Lands represent the first public lands of the United States. Activities therein were thus regulated by Governor Prentice, whose laws aimed to benefit the local community. For example, his tax on the fish caught in the Province Lands helped increase revenue for the colony's public schools.⁴⁰ The eastern boundary of the Province Lands is east of the Cohen shack and just west of the Fleurant shack, thus the state's first reserve overlaps with the western end of the Dune Shacks of Peaked Hill Bars Historic District.

of the Province and later the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as the Province Lands until 1893, when the town finally established ownership of that portion of state land.⁴⁹

Meanwhile the colonists were working to extend King's Highway, also known as County Road, out to the tip of Cape Cod. In 1720 it reached Truro, and only seven years later arrived at newly established Provincetown. Nonetheless, the consistently poor condition of this road meant that for years to come the easiest way to access the Outer Cape would be by water, despite the land route.⁵⁰ For over a century King's Highway was traveled by the Provincetown stagecoach, which stubbornly traversed a stretch of back shore along the north and east shore of East Harbor. The unpredictable nature of the surrounding dunes made this section of road perilously vulnerable to burial by displaced sand. Some stories even tell of "the stagecoach turning over, and dumping its passengers out into the sand. At any rate, in times of stormy weather and high winds, the stagecoach lumbered along, axle-deep in sand."⁵¹ Considering these conditions, there is little wonder that nautical transportation persisted as the preferred method of travel to the Outer Cape.

The same soil erosion issues which aggravated land transport also buried local agricultural fields. The town meadows of Truro and Provincetown fell victim to the onslaught of sand in the 1730s, and threatened to disappear altogether. An act passed by the Massachusetts General Court in 1739 attempted to curb this trend by forbidding the grazing of animals on any affected areas. It also required residents to plant beach grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*) each year. Other vegetation planted in an effort to control the moving sand included Scotch broom (*Cytisus acoparius*), native pines (*Pinus sp.*), bayberries (*Myrica pensylvanica*), and buckwheat (*Fagopyrum esculentum*).⁵²

In view of the land's limited production capacity, the early economies of Truro and Provincetown were driven to develop joint maritime and agricultural industries in order to survive. Whaling in particular became hugely popular as the common pilot whales, or blackfish, were highly valued for their blubber, bone, teeth, and oil. What began as a tradition of driving stray blackfish aground in the shallow waters of Cape Cod Bay swiftly grew into a full-blown industry, and when whales could no longer be found close at hand, Provincetown residents ventured out to sea in pursuit.⁵³ By 1737, so enticing were the benefits of the whaling trade that in some cases it left only twelve men at home.⁵⁴

The fragile nature of Provincetown's fisheries and local environment influenced the economic security of its inhabitants, and in 1748 the town's population numbered only two or three families. Without any viable alternatives such as agriculture or animal husbandry, local residents relied heavily upon their continued success in the fluctuating industries of fishing and whaling. In 1755

Provincetown had three solitary homes, while failed to appear in the Provincial Census of 1765. Still, renewed maritime pursuits soon drew a fresh wave of residents to the small settlement.⁵⁵ By 1775 the number of houses in Provincetown had increased to twenty, with a total population of 205. The inhabitants of the nearby town of Truro had similarly swelled by 33 percent from 1765 to 1776, when the population hit a high of 1,227.⁵⁶ Here residents built whaling vessels in the Pamet River, while several wharves were established at Indian Neck and elsewhere for fishing and coastal trade.⁵⁷

REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Yet even as they worked to establish themselves in this strange land, the colonists were forging a new future cradled by their wild surroundings and the republican ideals drifting in from France. After fifteen years of escalating tensions between the colonies and Great Britain the Revolutionary War finally erupted in 1775, breaking upon the shores of New England like a fierce, stormy sea.

As a solitary colonial outpost sticking out into the Atlantic, Cape Cod became particularly vulnerable to manipulation and attack. Thus no sooner had local fisheries finally begun to prosper than they were met with the obstacles of war. Nautical activities of every kind were severely curbed by the powerful and unyielding barricades of the British fleet, while fishing and deep-sea whaling throughout the Outer Cape came to an abrupt halt.⁵⁸

Due to the persistence of British raids during the war, the outpost of Provincetown was temporarily abandoned, while other towns along the Outer Cape were thrown into various states of desperation.⁵⁹ Many local fishermen found themselves forced to farm, smuggle, or privateer in order to support their families. Despite the poor soil, Truro residents managed to keep cattle, pigs, sheep, horses, and oxen in addition to cultivating corn, rye, oats, barley, and wheat.⁶⁰ During the war Truro was also protected by a local militia, which successfully repulsed a British attack at Pond Village.⁶¹ Independence soon granted to these early settlements of Cape Cod a whole new source of strength, spirit, and determination.

Though historic literature makes little mention of the land facing the Peaked Hill Bars during this era, attention is frequently paid to the bars themselves, which caused the demise of countless vessels. One of the most notorious of these was the frigate *Somerset*, a British man-of-war. This ship had stood in Boston Harbor on the night of Paul Revere's ride, just before the Battles of Lexington and Concord, and then gone on to storm Bunker Hill in the Battle of Bunker Hill during the Revolutionary War. Yet in early November of 1778 the same vessel was stranded helplessly on the Peaked Hill Bars, driven aground by a strong northeast gale. Residents of Provincetown and Truro watched the wreck wash ashore from up on

High Pole Hill, and summoned officials who took the British captain and other survivors prisoner.⁶² The disaster was much celebrated on the Cape and in Boston, as one small victory in the struggle against British rule. Relic hunters carried off most of what remained of the wreck a century later, when shifting sands exposed a portion of its skeleton.⁶³

POST-WAR RECOVERY AND GROWTH

Shipwrecks along the back shore continued to provide a valuable source of income for the struggling communities of the Outer Cape, particularly after the Revolutionary War. For instance, one English vessel destroyed between Race Point and the Peaked Hill Bars was dubbed a providential wreck, as it apparently carried “every imaginable necessity” in its hold.⁶⁴ The frequency of similar accidents on Cape Cod made beachcombing a legitimate source of income along the back shore. Indeed, according to Vorse:

So profitable was wrecking, the stripping of ships, the beachcombing of wreckage on the back side, that the popular sentiment of the Cape was against making this coast safer.⁶⁵

Years later, in 1854, the keeper of Nauset Light shared the same story with Ralph Waldo Emerson. According to Emerson, when the construction of this lighthouse was first proposed it was met with “obstinate resistance on Cape Cod. . . as it would injure the wrecking business.”⁶⁶

In spite of this almost barbaric attitude, wreckers can be counted among the first lifesavers on the Cape, as they occasionally found themselves drawn away from pillage to save imperiled human lives.⁶⁷ In the words of Thoreau from his book, *Cape Cod*,

. . . we saw hardly a track to show that any had ever crossed this desert. Yet I was told that some are always out on the Back-side night and day in severe weather, looking for wrecks, in order that they may get the job of discharging the cargo, or the like, — and thus shipwrecked men are succored.⁶⁸

Yet, even with help from the profits of beachcombing, inhabitants of the Outer Cape took a slow road to recovery following the Revolutionary War. Relations with Great Britain remained strained for some years. In an effort to stimulate the nation’s ailing commercial fisheries, the federal government granted bounties in 1789 and 1792.⁶⁹

In 1786 the Massachusetts Humane Society was founded, representing the first attempt to organize relief for shipwrecked seafarers in the United States and Cape Cod. Gradually maritime pursuits began to pick up again, and in 1797 the federal government built the first lighthouse on Cape Cod, Highland Light, which was not far from the village of Truro. In Provincetown the renewed success of the

fishing industry once again prompted local growth, and by 1800 the town had 144 dwellings, 90 stores, five shops, ten saltworks, and five herring smokehouses.⁷⁰

Fishermen on Cape Cod also benefited from their location, as they were able to manage short voyages out to George's Bank despite the tight political circumstances.⁷¹ After a brief lag in growth during the War of 1812, both Truro and Provincetown thrived. Echoing trends witnessed earlier during colonial settlement, the land in these towns was heavily exploited. By 1820 Truro had cleared all available woodlands, and was being forced to import wood for fuel and ship construction. While some residents of the town produced salt, most foodstuffs were brought in from other towns.⁷² In Provincetown the fishing fleet increased from 20 ships in 1790 to 98 in 1837, and merchants maintained a healthy trade exporting cod to Europe (Figure 1.5). Vessels sailed from here all the way to Newfoundland and Labrador, and then lay their bounty of fish out to dry on flakes in Provincetown Harbor.⁷³

Meanwhile, erosion continued in the dunes outside Provincetown and Truro.⁷⁴ The landscape at this time was likely similar to that described by visitor Henry David Thoreau, who wrote in 1849:

In one place we saw numerous dead tops of trees projecting through the otherwise uninterrupted desert, where, as we afterward learned, thirty or forty years before a flourishing forest had stood, and now, as the trees were laid bare from year to year, the inhabitants cut off their tops for fuel.⁷⁵

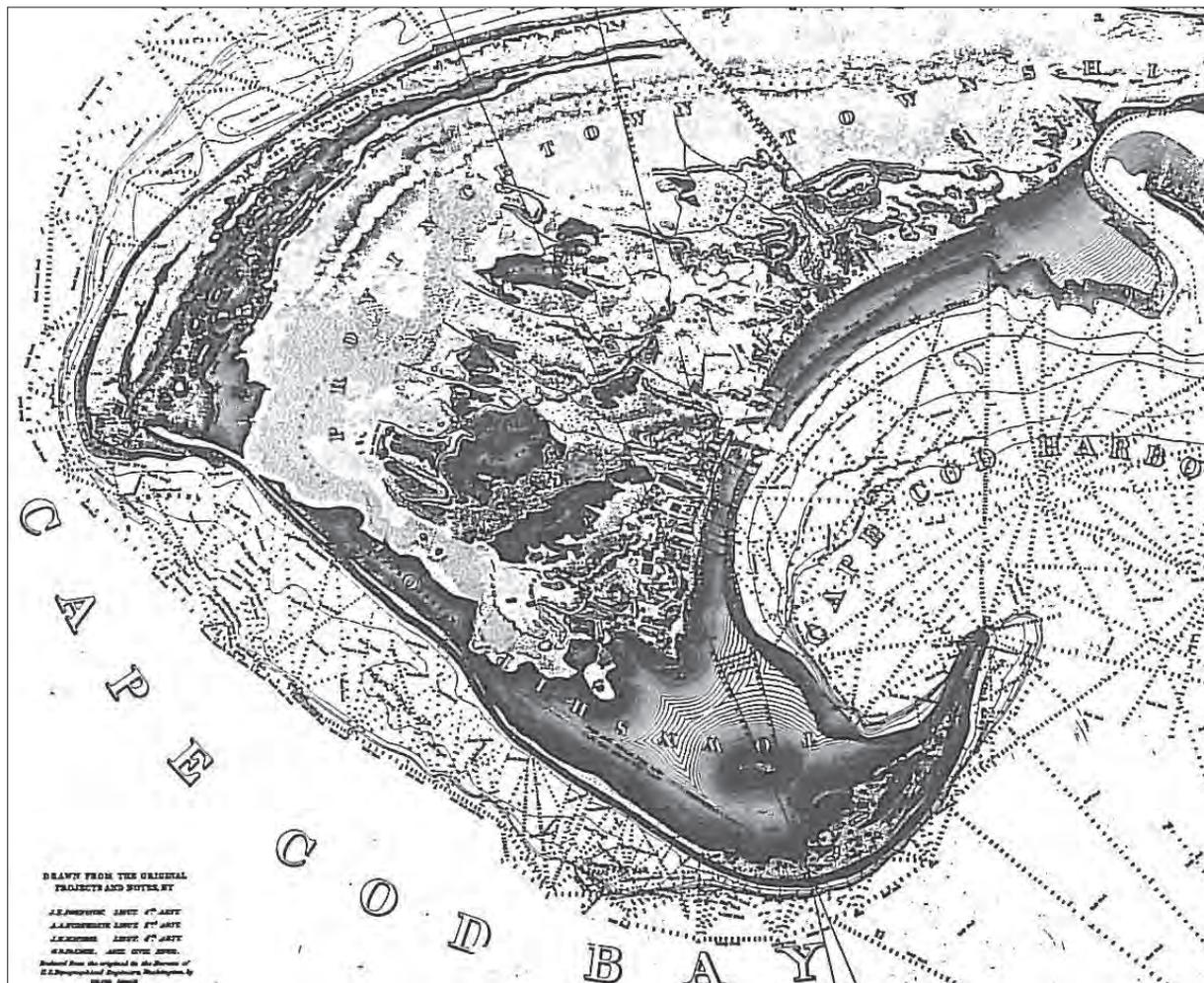
Thoreau regularly calls the back shore “the Deserts,” a name which he evidently appreciated in both physical appearance and harsh reality. Writing of the walk along the Peaked Hill Bars area east to west toward Race Point, he complained that “all the while it was not so calm as the reader may suppose, but it was blow, blow, blow, — roar, roar, roar, — tramp, tramp, tramp, — without interruption.”⁷⁶ Despite the region's early efforts to protect against deforestation, Thoreau's descriptions fitted the dunes of the back shore as well in the early nineteenth century as they do today. With the turn of the area's first farming settlers to maritime activities for survival the demand for salt works and giant wooden vessels rose, and the land continued to be depleted of woods and forests in the subsequent 150 years.⁷⁷

In short, over the course of the European settlement of Cape Cod and the subsequent Colonial and Federal Periods, the cultural landscape of the Provincetown and Truro areas changed dramatically. Though natural systems and features remained largely the same, the once densely wooded areas of the Outer Cape had by the nineteenth century fallen victim to blowing sands and human exploitation. Whereas woodlands covered much of the region when it was first settled, before long Truro and Provincetown were characterized by sweeping vistas only occasionally dotted with stunted vegetation.

By the early 1800s the settlements of nearby Provincetown and Truro included private homes, wharves, some salt works, and even a lighthouse. European settlements clustered around the ocean, which sustained them, but avoided the harsh exposure of the back shore. Despite the construction of the Cape’s first highway, circulation continued to be limited by the region’s sandy soils and by residents’ lack of interest in the land.

In the relative absence of any direct documentation of the Peaked Hill Bars during these years, a fairly consistent pattern of dune destabilization due to clearing can be surmised. Persisting attempts to cultivate crops and clear land, driven in many cases by desperation, quickly exhausted the limited productivity offered by the shallow topsoil throughout the Outer Cape. The area meanwhile continued to be utilized for other natural resources including cranberries, beach plum, and bayberry as well as whatever wildlife may have lived there. In the mid-nineteenth century Thoreau remarked on the presence of boxberry (*Gaultheria procumbens*), bayberry, beach plum, huckleberry (*Gaylussacia sp.*), strawberry (*Fragaria sp.*), shadbush (*Amelanchier canadensis*) fruits called “Josh-pears” by locals, and commercial “cranberry meadows” in addition to mink, muskrat, fox, raccoon, wild mice, and toads.⁷⁸

Figure 1.5. Map of Provincetown, showing early development of the area in 1836. The map dates from before any life saving stations were constructed. East Harbor is shown at right as an inlet that had already begun to fill with sand blown from the nearby dunes (Graham, 1833–36).



INDUSTRIAL PERIOD AND LIFE SAVING, 1830 TO 1919

In the century spanning the mid 1800s to early 1900s, industrial innovations dramatically altered the character of the Outer Cape. At the same time, great strides were made in improving communication with ships, navigational aids, and lifesaving stations. On the back shore this period was punctuated by the construction of the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station in 1872 and the subsequent addition of various ancillary structures, some of which became the earliest dune shacks. Key sources for this period included early maps and photographs, the land use study noted above, James O’Connell’s *Becoming Cape Cod* (2003), Henry David Thoreau’s *Cape Cod*, penned in 1865, and Mary Heaton Vorse’s *Time and the Town: A Provincetown Chronicle* (1942). Many details on the development of the Provincetown arts community are extracted from Vorse, who was a pivotal figure in the Provincetown community throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Both a writer and a journalist, Vorse moved to Provincetown from New York in 1907 and remained until her death in 1966, at age 92.⁷⁹ Her history of the town is both poetic and charming, and carries with it the insights of a Provincetown local.

INDUSTRY AND CIVIL WAR

As the nineteenth century began, industry took a brief hold in the towns of the Outer Cape. Truro’s salt production peaked in 1831 with 39 salt works, before fishing became paramount and the town turned to importing salt from neighboring towns. The industry’s decline was so swift that by 1865 Truro did not have a single surviving salt works. Agricultural practices had also disappeared from the region by this time, replaced by flourishing mackerel and cod fisheries. In 1837 Truro’s catch was valued as second only to that of Provincetown. Between that year and the peak of the fishing industry in 1851, fifteen brigs and schooners were constructed on the Pamet River.⁸⁰

Despite some small fluctuations in growth, the maritime industries of nearby Provincetown were similarly booming. When Truro’s residents failed to save Pamet Harbor from silting over in the 1850s, the ensuing slack in the fishing market was smoothly assumed by Provincetown’s fishermen.⁸¹ Though the size of its fleet had recently shrunk by half, this town’s harbor was restored in 1855 to its former might, or some 100 vessels. In describing his view of the Atlantic from the Peaked Hill Bars area in 1849, Thoreau remarked on the teaming fishing industry: “We counted about two hundred sail of mackerel fishers within one small arc of the horizon, and a nearly equal number had disappeared southward.”⁸²

With the onslaught of the Civil War in 1861, the demand for fish and other supplies escalated, even as raids of the area by Confederate privateers increased. Once again Cape Cod was a location vulnerable to attack, but also proved to be

a productive resource for the Union throughout the war. Funding poured into the town for new, larger ships equipped with steel hulls. In 1865 a full 36 percent of Provincetown's population worked in fishing, while still others engaged in the revived whaling industry. In 1845, only Nantucket boasted a higher number of whaling vessels in the Cape Cod area. Still more remarkable was that this magnitude of production was sustained throughout the Civil War. From 1837 to 1865 Provincetown's whale oil production increased from 21,420 gallons to 91,571 gallons. Profits eventually lagging only as a result of tough competition from Pennsylvania's coal mines and petroleum fields.⁸³

Other local industries associated with maritime pursuits thrived as well. Although ship construction peaked in 1845, Provincetown also manufactured blocks, pumps, anchors, and chains. The town's sailmakers were moreover known as the premier manufacturers of sails on the Outer Cape. The thirty wharves of Provincetown Harbor teemed with activity due to these industries and the wealth of warehouses, stores, and private homes. In the 1850s the increasingly ambitious town decided to physically relocate the small fishing village at Long Point to Provincetown, in order to further local expansion. Over the next decade the old settlement area at Long Point was built up with two gun batteries to aid with Civil War defenses. Confident and secure in its industrial might, Provincetown's population soared from 1,710 in 1830 to 3,472 in 1865.⁸⁴

As in earlier years, the back shore was a mere periphery to these industrial developments, though it showed certain evidence of the increased human habitation and transportation in the area. For the first time, the history of the Peaked Hill Bars becomes rich with the tangled tales of human and natural events during this era. Describing the disasters along the back shore, Henry Beston later wrote:

To understand this great outer beach, to appreciate its atmosphere, its "feel," one must have a sense of it as the scene of wreck and elemental drama. Tales and legends of the great disasters fill no inconsiderable niche in the Cape mind. Older folk will tell you of the *Jason*, of how she struck near Pamet in a gale of winter rain, and of how the breakers flung the solitary survivor on the midnight beach; others will tell of the tragic *Castagna* and the frozen men who were taken off while the snow flurries obscured the February sun. Go about in the cottages, and you may sit in a chair taken from one great wreck and at a table taken from another; the cat purring at your feet may be himself a rescued mariner.⁸⁵

The scene depicted by Beston was one shared by the entire back shore including Eastham, and particularly the preserved portions of the Provincetown and Truro dunes, throughout much of the nineteenth century.

disasters and loss of life on the back shore soon drew the attention of the United States government. Although it continued to fund the Humane Society until 1870, the government began building its own life-saving stations in 1847. At first these establishments were managed entirely by volunteer crews. Yet after much mismanagement and one particularly severe sea disaster off the coast of New Jersey, the program began providing keepers with full salaries in 1854.⁹⁰

By 1869, all United States government station crew members were awarded full salaries, and the old Humane Society buildings were already beginning to fall out of use.⁹¹ Although the society managed to maintain some of its old refuge huts into the twentieth century, by the late nineteenth century the government had taken primary responsibility for disasters on the back shore.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PEAKED HILL BARS LIFE-SAVING STATION

The United States Life-Saving Service (USLSS) was created as a branch of the Marine Revenue Service in 1872, marking the first permanent development within the Peaked Hill Bars area (see Figure 1.6).⁹² In order to maintain its new outposts the USLSS began offering near full-time paid employment to crew members.⁹³ Keepers and surfmen were mostly local men with long maritime histories, including a number of Portuguese immigrants. For ten months of the year, from August to June, these men spent all but one day a week living and working at the stations, taking on the additional responsibility of protecting any lost or wrecked property from the “wreckers” or beachcombers who constantly scoured the local beach for treasures. Walking beach patrols were set in place to locate new shipwrecks and people in distress, a measure which had the added benefit of discouraging smuggling.⁹⁴

The Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station was one of nine USLSS installations constructed the year it was established in 1872, and quickly became known as one of the most dangerous. The new building looked out over a treacherous strip of coast where two lines of sand bars, or the Peaked Hill Bars, stretch beneath the surface of the water and run parallel to the shore for almost six miles (see Figures 1.6 to 1.12). In general the inner bars sit somewhere around six hundred yards from the beach, while the outer bars are roughly fourteen hundred yards out. However, the magnitude of their peril is largely owed to their constantly shifting nature and the unpredictable depths of the water covering them.⁹⁵ As described by Cape Cod writer Mary Heaton Vorse:

It was almost impossible for a sailing vessel to clew off the lee shore from Race Point to Monomoy. A vicious current runs along this elbow of the Cape, making anchorage impossible in a wind. There is no cove or harbor on the shore for sixty miles where a vessel can take refuge. The process that originally made the Cape is still going on. Off Peaked Hill there is a treacherous outer bar and an inner bar. Charts help not at all, for the bars are constantly shifting and chang-

ing their position. The space between the two bars is a practically sure death-trap, and vessels once caught there are pounded to match-wood. Vessels of all nationality, cargoes of every kind, and countless lives have been shattered on Peaked Hill Bars or the other Cape shoals from Race Point to Monomoy. Fishing vessels were the most unfortunate, for this dangerous coast was in the direct route to the Grand Banks.⁹⁶

The surfmen of the Peaked Hill Bars station patrolled roughly two miles up and down this coast, walking the windswept beach in every kind of weather (see Figures 1.6 and 1.12). Their knowledge of the sea was thoroughly tested through years of experience, and their fearlessness in venturing out into the dangerous surf inspired decades of stories to enrich local lore. Over the years the windows of the life-saving station itself became entirely clouded from the blowing sands, so that they nearly shut out all daylight and looked “as if they had been dipped in acid.”⁹⁷

A few notorious Outer Cape wrecks of the mid 1800s include the brig *Cactus* in 1848; the *White Squall* in 1866; the *Aurora* (also known as the “Palm Oil Wreck” for the cargo she carried) around the same time; and the *Clara Belle*, which was laden with coal in 1872.⁹⁸ A total of 500 shipwrecks were officially recorded along the Cape shore from Monomoy to Race Point between 1843 and 1859; 540 more were noted from 1880 to 1903; and 156 were recorded between 1910 and 1917.⁹⁹ With an average of at least 23 shipwrecks a year, this coastline was known as the graveyard of the Atlantic (see Figures 1.11 and 1.13).¹⁰⁰

In the Peaked Hill Bars area specifically, a string of ships were completely destroyed near the end of the nineteenth century including *Willie H. Higgins*, *Albert L. Butler*, *Cathie C. Berry*, *Kate L. Robinson*, and *Jennie C. May*. By 1902 the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station was equipped with two surf boats, two sets of beach apparatus, breeches-buoys, guns, and a practice boat (see Figures 1.9

Figure 1.7. Peaked Hill Bar Life Saving Station in 1902, surfmen with Captain Cook seated at center (Dalton, 1902, 77).



and 1.10). The crew there managed to save all seven men aboard the schooner *Kate L. Robinson*, but many others were less fortunate.¹⁰¹ Over the course of roughly twenty-five years in the first half of the twentieth century, surfmen rescued an estimated one thousand people along the Peaked Hill Bars.¹⁰²

The number of losses along the back shore over the years was further aggravated by the severity and frequency of New England storms. The same gale that destroyed the *Minot's Ledge*

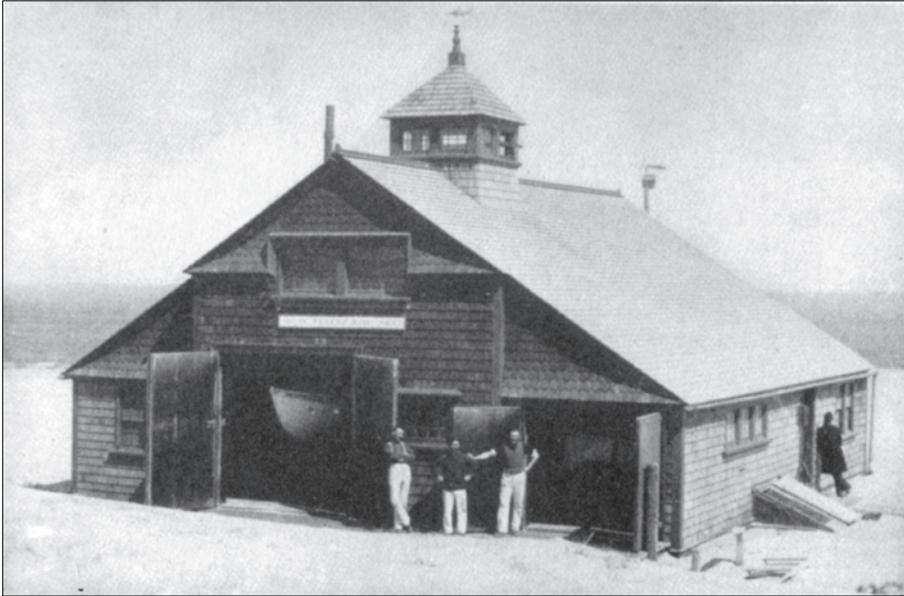


Figure 1.8. Historic photo of the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station sometime in the 1880s or 1890s. Note the proximity to the ocean and barren surroundings (Dalton, 1902, 73).



Figure 1.9. Postcard of the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station, c. 1900. Note the cluster of outbuildings adjacent to the station and on the dune beyond (Courtesy James W. Claflin Collection).



Figure 1.10. Postcard of the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station, c. 1900. Note the cluster of outbuildings adjacent to the station and the proximity of the ocean (Courtesy James W. Claflin Collection).

Lighthouse off of Cohasset in 1851 buried more than half of Provincetown's Beach Point, on the east edge of East Harbor, under water. Two additional historic storms have similarly broken through the back shore to the East Harbor area, temporarily transforming Provincetown into an island.¹⁰³ The famous Portland Gale struck on November 26, 1898, and is thought to have been the most severe storm to hit Cape Cod since European settlement of the area. It raged for a full 36 hours and was named after its merciless destruction of the paddle-wheel steamboat *Portland*. All 150 to 200 passengers aboard perished along with the boat, a loss recognized as one of Cape Cod's worst maritime disasters. The 100 mile per hour winds of the Portland Gale also destroyed Provincetown's Union and Central Wharves, and blew out the light and windows of the Highland Lighthouse.¹⁰⁴

On the other hand, these giant storms were simple punctuation marks in the unrelenting wear that battered the dunes of the back shore. For instance, when the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station was first built it had a clear view down to the sea. Yet by the turn of the century the dunes had moved to block this path, and a view of the shore could only be gained from the station's lookout tower. In an effort to remedy this problem, by 1902 a small ancillary building had been constructed on the bluff overlooking the ocean as both a lookout and a spot for leisure activities (see Figure 1.9).¹⁰⁵ In this ever-changing landscape, the struggle to maintain water access for the station's boat houses while simultaneously avoiding destruction was ongoing. Other buildings present in the vicinity during this period were subject to the same challenges. A historic map from 1880 shows a group of fishing houses standing to the northwest of the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station (see Figure 1.12). The structures illustrated here likely included some of the original dune shacks, which resembled the Kemp shack.¹⁰⁶

Figure 1.11. The remains of a ship wreck along the shore west of the Peaked Hill Bars, sometime at the end of the nineteenth century (Dalton, 1902, 78).



Evidence of the changing dune landscape was continually manifest at nearby

East Harbor, where open water had once marked Provincetown's East Harbor, but was gradually transformed into an estuary bay and eventually termed Pilgrim Lake (see Figure 1.6). During its first years of existence the town could only be accessed by traversing the thin, sandy inner edge of this harbor, then called Beach Point. Over time as the trees on the so-called "back side" were cut down for fuel and ship-building the destabilized dunes began to move with the prevailing wind, hence the

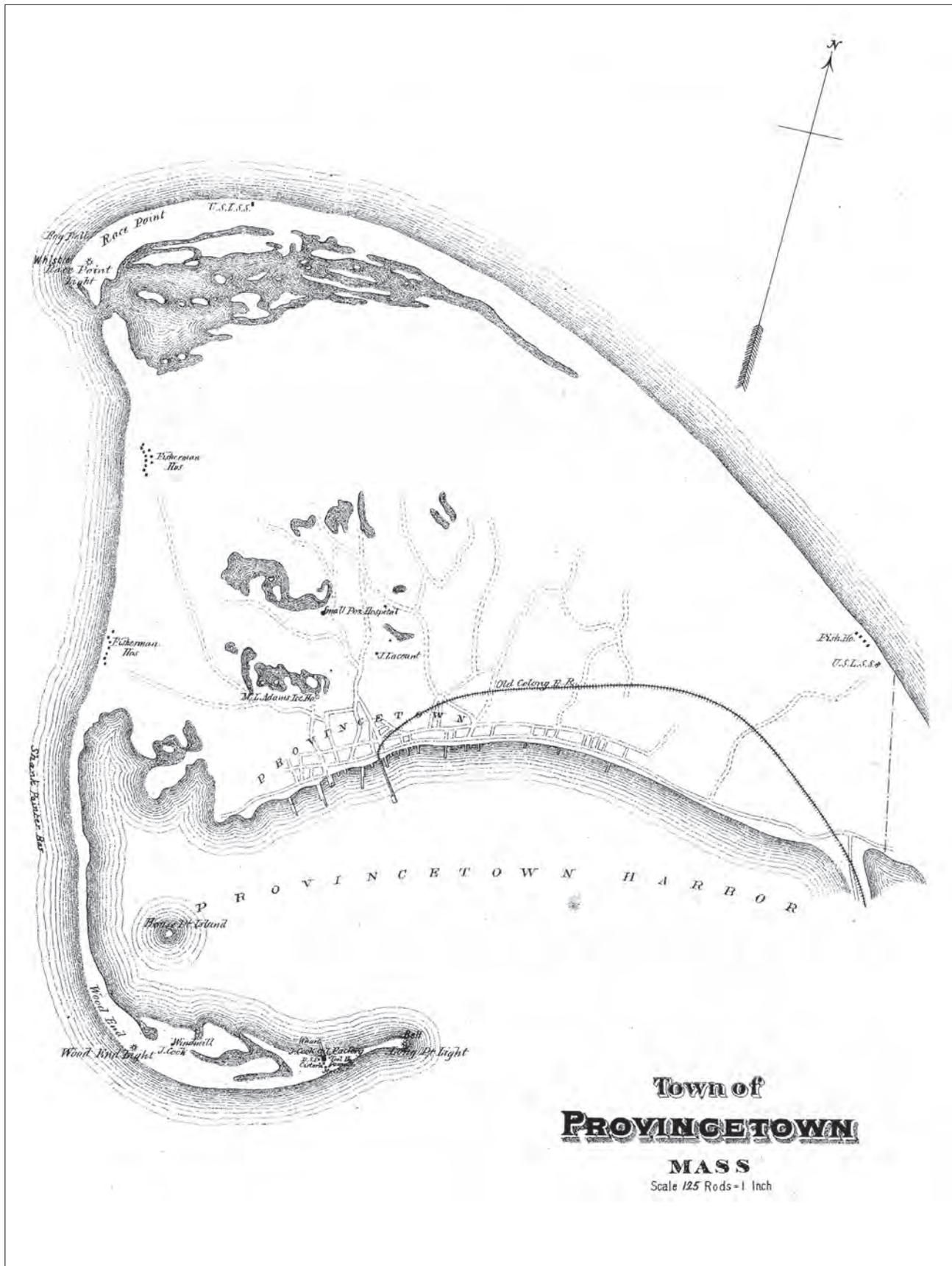


Figure 1.12. Map of Provincetown in 1880. Note the Truro town line and newly constructed bridge closing off East Harbor, at right. Just above it the Peaked Hill Bars Life Saving Station is marked "U.S.L.S.S." while a group of nearby fishing houses are labeled "Fish Ho." Also shown are access roads into the dunes (Walker, 1880).

Figure 1.13. Map of Cape Cod showing the locations of the old United States Life-Saving Stations, from 1902. The circles off the coast mark the principal shipwrecks which took place during the preceding fifty years (Dalton, 1902, 6).

term “walking dunes.” These sands moved west into East Harbor and soon blew through the inlet to Provincetown Harbor, where they began to threaten the use of the entire area by increasingly sizeable ships in the mid-nineteenth century. In an effort to stem the flow of sand the town constructed a bridge across the inlet between the two harbors in 1855. Yet storms swiftly ravaged this frail structure, and in 1858 Provincetown made a second attempt to save its harbor by building a solid dike alongside the old bridge, thus transforming East Harbor into Pilgrim Lake. The 1,600 foot opening was traversed a second time in 1873, by a causeway



that carried the Old Colony Railroad and later U.S. Route 6 (see Figures 1.12 and 1.14).¹⁰⁷

In the 1890s, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts escalated efforts to stabilize the shifting dune sands and reduce sand encroachment in Provincetown Harbor and East Harbor. In 1893, the state appointed James A. Small to develop a sand reclamation and binding program, which ultimately proved successful and became a model for other coastal communities. Under the direction of Small, crews planted over 200 acres of beach grass plantations and discovered that fall plantings were more successful. They inter-planted tree and shrub seedlings, such as pine and bayberry, which were initially protected by the grass and eventually formed a stronger vegetation layer. They also laid brush along roadways to hold the sand and protect plantings, including the new State road across the dunes from Provincetown to the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station (the initial Snail Road), which was initiated in 1894 and completed in 1901 (Figure 1.15).¹⁰⁸

Even as access to Provincetown became increasingly secure and its population grew, life on the back shore remained remote. The only way to visit the dunes was by foot or by horse and wagon. Despite the construction of the new road to the station, the route was a laborious trek over miles of loose sand (Figures 1.16 to 1.19).

Captain Cook's horse, Daisy, wandered the dunes around the station, alternately charming and alarming visitors and helping herself to generous drinks from the



Figure 1.14. Map dated 1893 showing the railroad extending to the Provincetown pier and the three life-saving stations along the back shore (www.capecodhistory.us/maps, accessed 6/11/09).

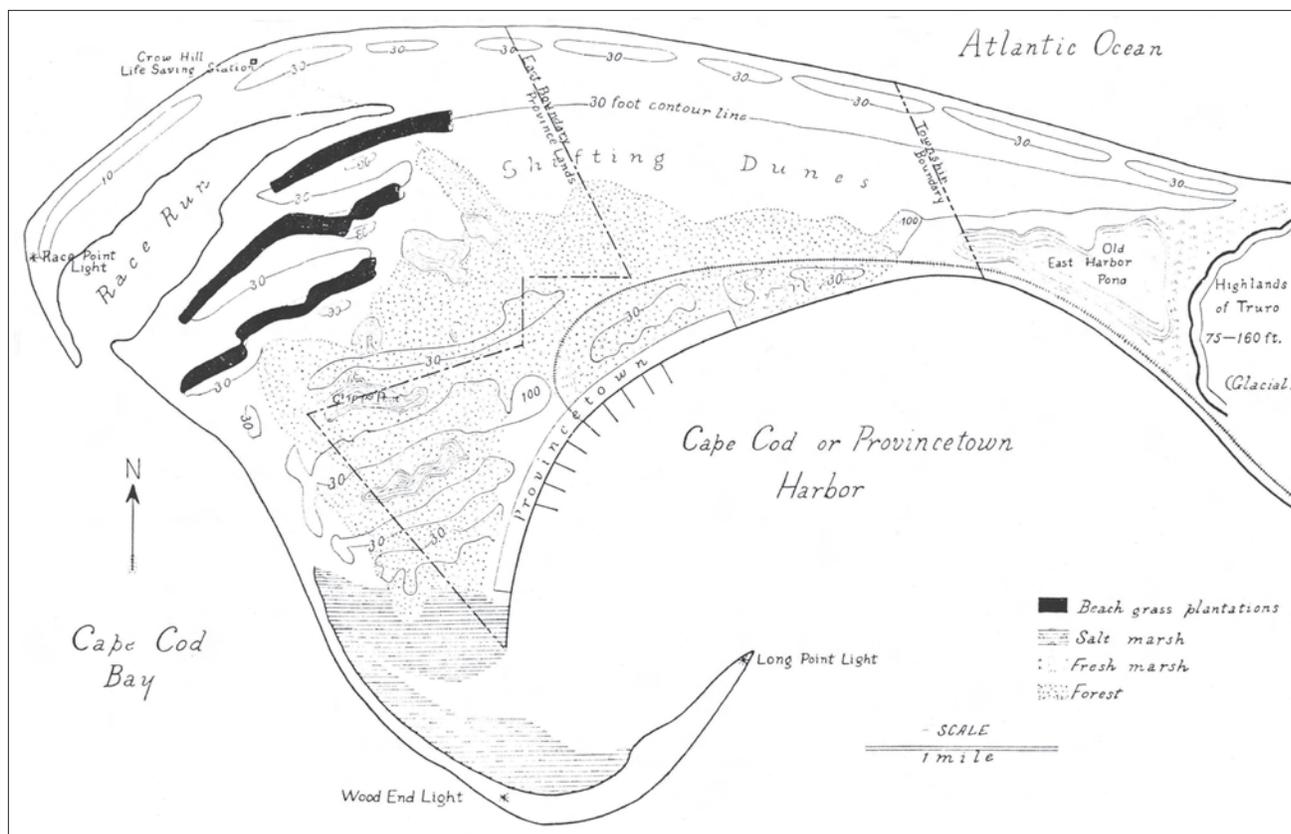


Figure 1.15. Map of sand areas enclosing Provincetown Harbor and beach grass plantations, from the pamphlet "Reclamation of Cape Cod Sand Dunes," prepared by J. M. Westgate, Assistant in Sand-binding Work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1904. The reclamation program installed beach grass plantations to prevent sand from blowing into the town and harbors to the south. The map also shows the boundary between Provincetown and the Province Lands established in 1893.



Figure 1.16. A horse and wagon crossing the dunes on the way to the Peaked Hill Bars Life Saving Station, sometime near the end of the nineteenth century. Note the lack of vegetation (Dalton, 1902, 74).



Figure 1.17. Likely the DePass horse and wagon, on the dunes at Race Point in 1901. The ride over the dunes from Provincetown to Race Point was five miles (Provincetown History Project Archives).

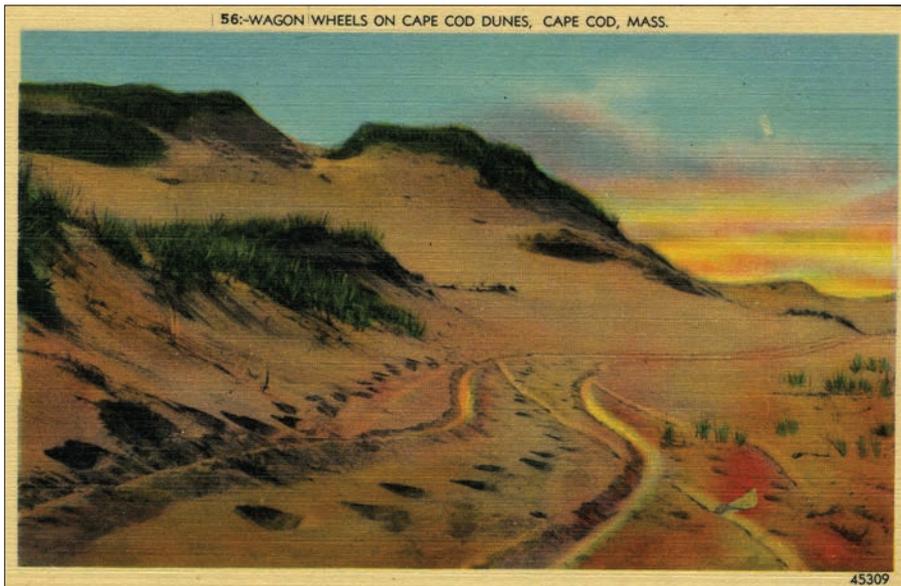


Figure 1.18. Undated color-enhanced postcard showing horse tracks and “wagon wheels on Cape Cod dunes” (Pilgrim Monument Archives).



Figure 1.19. Undated color-enhanced postcard of salt spray roses in bloom and minimal vegetation on the dunes (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

fire buckets. The station also kept a hen coop, and other associated structures soon sprang up nearby. The Kemp shack is thought to have once served as a hen house, and similar establishments out in the dunes are known to have consisted of building clusters. For example, a chicken house in the style of other dune shacks can be seen standing next to the Race Point Light in a photo from 1901 or 1902 (Figure 1.20).¹⁰⁹

Shipwrecks along the back shore not only influenced human activity in the Peaked Hill Bars, but they also contributed to the area's biological diversity. The various materials that washed ashore also brought change, in particular certain hardy seeds which managed to take root in the sandy soil and eventually spread. Thoreau mentions one such instance of introduced plants that he believed came from the *Franklin*, a ship that wrecked on the shore near Cahoon's Hollow in Wellfleet, roughly twelve miles south of the Peaked Hill Bars in 1849.¹¹⁰

A man travelling by the shore...not long before us noticed something green growing in the pure sand of the beach, just at high-water mark, and on approaching found it to be a bed of beets flourishing vigorously, probably from seed washed out of the *Franklin*. Also beets and turnips came up in the seaweed used for manure in many parts of the Cape. This suggests how various plants may have been dispersed over the world to distant islands and continents. Vessels, with seeds in their cargoes, destined for particular ports, where perhaps they were not needed, have been cast away on desolate islands, and though their crews perished, some of their seeds have been preserved.¹¹¹

Figure 1.20. The Race Point Light and associated buildings, around 1901 or 1902. Note the small shack, or chicken house, with chickens in the foreground (Provincetown History Project Archives).



According to Vorse, Captain Cook of the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station would sometimes pick what were called Japanese or salt spray rose out from a clump of bayberry to the northeast of the station. Rumored to have come from the wreck of a Chinese bark, these flowers soon appeared across the dunes and around town, as Coast Guardsmen transplanted them to the gardens of their family homes (see Figure 1.19).¹¹² Admiring the same roses throughout the dunes years later, Cynthia Huntington speculated that the plant's seeds were originally washed ashore "from some capsized Japanese freighter or fishing boat."¹¹³

As indicated by their gardens, the life-saving stations along the back shore were little pockets of humanity and culture, nestled in the desert landscape of the dunes. Distinct from the isolation around them, they were yet unable to escape its effects. Mary Heaton Vorse remarks upon dune life thus:

There is a masculine monotony in a coast-guard station which reminds one of life aboard ship. Turn and turn about the men cook and clean and scrub and paint. There is a sense of spacious and leisured life, of time accurately spaced, ample for the specific duties of the station.¹¹⁴

Vorse goes on to reminisce, how "there was no finer way to spend an evening than to take a few lobsters across to Peaked Hill Bars, in time for supper, for the Captain dearly loved to pick a lobster" (see Figure 1.7).¹¹⁵

FISHERMEN, ARTISTS, AND TOURISTS

The isolated yet strangely social life of leisure found on the back shore soon began drawing the first few artists out into the dunes from Provincetown. Though it had long balanced at the edge of human survival with its landscape of stark colors and drifting sands, the back shore did not begin fully capturing the human imagination until this period of prolonged habitation. When not on the job life-saving staff used the dunes of the Peaked Hill Bars for contemplative solitude and inspiration. Vorse recounts how "in the old days at Peaked Hill station there would be always a group of the coast guard whittling, on a bench over by the sand bluff looking out to sea."¹¹⁶ With nearby Provincetown continuing to grow in popularity, it would only be a matter of time before the artistic attraction of the dune landscape became one of its most important assets.

The early 1900s brought a massive transformation to the United States, in terms of both development and attitude. Alexander Graham Bell had no sooner created the telephone than the American Telephone and Telegraph Company had wired the world. South of Provincetown, in Wellfleet, the radio towers of Guglielmo Marconi dispatched the first two-way transatlantic wireless message from America to England in 1902.¹¹⁷ It was these very towers which allowed the U.S. Navy to finally retire its homing pigeons, and made possible the saving of 712 lives from the wreck of the *Titanic* by the *Carpathia* in 1912.¹¹⁸ Living spaces and

architecture were meanwhile revolutionized by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. The appearance of Ford automobiles in mass numbers, and at more affordable prices, changed the way people perceived physical space and travel.¹¹⁹

Most importantly, this development finally brought the perceived isolation of Provincetown crumbling down. Indeed, one of the early and leading agents of change on the Outer Cape was transportation. In 1873 the Cape Cod Railroad reached Provincetown for the first time and introduced the convenience of shipping fresh fish directly to distant markets (see Figure 1.14). Truro opened several facilities to help accommodate this capability and the shift away from the old tradition of salting fish, including a fish canning plant and a freezing plant in 1893. The new methods for shipment and storage opened up the fishing industry, allowing the sale of many fish that had previously spoiled too quickly for transportation. Eels in particular became an important component of the Boston market, while weir fishing for herring, cod, whiting, mackerel, flounder, and squid rapidly rose in popularity during the 1870s and afterwards.¹²⁰ In 1893 Provincetown was highly prosperous and finally obtained from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts a title to the portion of the Province Lands within the town center area, despite the fact that it had been incorporated as a town back in 1727 (see Figure 1.15). The division between town and state lands became roughly defined by the path of U.S. Route 6 in later years.¹²¹

In 1900 six fish processing and freezing plants were built along Provincetown Harbor, each with its own wharf for loading and unloading. Belching smoke high up into the sky from towering brick chimneys, these industrial giants dwarfed the town's other buildings, contrasting starkly with the architecture of what until then had been a simple fishing village.¹²² The town was struggling valiantly to keep up with the industrial development occurring throughout the rest of the country. In addition to the Western Cold Storage, Cape Cod Cold Storage, Fisherman's Cold Storage, Colonial Cold Storage and the Consolidated Weir Company Cold Storage, there was the Puritan Shirt Factory, Pickert's Canning Factory and a factory for processing guano fertilizer.¹²³

Despite Provincetown's success, many towns of the Outer Cape saw their prosperity flag and populations drop, in the final years of the nineteenth century. For example, between 1870 and 1910 Truro's numbers decreased by 48 percent, from 1,269 to a mere 655. Yet Provincetown managed to avoid a similar decline in its numbers and instead saw an increase, from 3,865 in 1870 to 4,369 in 1910. The town's continued success and immunity to the depression felt elsewhere on the Cape can be attributed largely to its burgeoning immigrant population. In 1875 Portuguese residents composed about thirteen percent of the town's total residents. By 1905 this number had grown to twenty-three percent, and people of Portuguese descent accounted for Cape Cod's largest single ethnic group. Particularly in the west end of Provincetown, a high concentration of Azorean

and Cape Verdean families settled.¹²⁴ Most immigrants came to work in the fishing or whaling industries, and continued to steadily flood the town between 1911 and 1920. Before long, they were responsible for an estimated ninety percent of Provincetown's fishing activities.¹²⁵ Around the same time mariners began using trawls to replace the older style of anchored fishing with a single line, and local productivity soared.¹²⁶

Along the waterfront and on the back shore, fishermen used little sheds or "stores" as workshops to knot fishing nets, make small equipment repairs and keep their gear dry.¹²⁷ They also camped and built their own temporary structures in areas like Bill's Camp, which was located between the Malicoat shack and the site of the old Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station.¹²⁸ Already equipped with a rich knowledge of the ocean and its restless company, many Portuguese immigrants likely felt comfortable living off the unruly waters of the Peaked Hill Bars. Some, like Dominic Avila, built fishing shacks there along with other Provincetown residents, not only for work and storage but for entertainment. Shacks toward the northwest end of the back shore in particular were used for fishing purposes as well as surf casting from the beach, which was popular at the time.¹²⁹

In addition, the back shore proved optimal for bird hunting. Thus some shacks were employed by hunters in search of birds or other game in the dunes. One of these structures, built primarily with the purpose of hunting in mind, can be seen in a collection of 1901 to 1902 of Race Point photographs (Figures 1.21 and 1.22). The shack pictured therein was built by Louis W. DePass, who is said to have constructed it using materials from the 1898 wreckage of the famous steamer, *Portland*. The DePass shack stood near the Race Point Light and was utilized for many years by Mr. DePass and his family, including his son Louis J. DePass.¹³⁰ The building seen in the background of Figure 1.22 is possibly an outbuilding associated with the Race Point Light.

By the late nineteenth century the scenic, peaceful landscape of the dunes was also beginning to attract curious visitors. Provincetown was one of the earliest towns on the Cape to have hotels, some of which were established in 1868. Its large Portuguese population lent the town a certain European air, which contributed to the tourist attraction.¹³¹ So-called "accommodations" or "barges" were special wagons which brought visitors from their train or steamer to their hotel in town. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft stayed at the upscale Gifford House, while boarding houses were popular among more regular travelers. The Highland Light overlooking the back shore became a main feature, and the Highland Links were constructed in 1892 to help attract guests to the nearby Highland House. In the 1890s the Commonwealth of Massachusetts also opened the Province Lands to public use, including twelve miles of roads connecting Provincetown to the outer beach, which were armored with branches as described earlier. The town drew still more tourists in 1892 with



Figure 1.21. Louis J. DePass posing in front of the DePass shack at Race Point, in 1901. Note the coastal inlet at right (Provincetown History Project Archives).



Figure 1.22. DePass family members standing in front of their shack at Race Point, in 1901. Note the neighboring outbuilding in the background (Provincetown History Project Archives).

the construction of the Pilgrim Monument, which celebrated Provincetown's association with the *Mayflower* (Figure 1.23). President Roosevelt himself officiated at the groundbreaking for this towering structure, which continues to dominate the landscape of the Cape's tip today and can be seen from many points in the dunes of Provincetown and Truro (Figure 1.24).¹³²

Figure 1.23. Looking east from the top of the Pilgrim Monument in 1914. The dunes are visible in the distance. (photo album, Cape Cod NS Archives).



While tourists could see the dunes from the top of Pilgrim Monument, intrepid photographers ventured into the dunes to capture scenic spots on photographic postcards. These late nineteenth and early twentieth century postcards portrayed the beauty and vast spatial qualities of the dune landscape. Picturesque shots capturing a lightly trodden trail in the sand, colorful flowers, and a glimpse of the ocean offered enticing views of the ultimate destination on the Outer Cape, and engendered a sense of



Figure 1.24. Tourists in the dunes with the Pilgrim Monument in the distance, 1914 (photo album, Cape Cod NS Archives).



Figure 1.25. Tourist resting on a wreck on the outer beach in 1914 (photo album, Cape Cod NS Archives).

public ownership of the Province Lands (see Figures 1.18, 1.19, 1.25). Curious tourists soon followed, often accessing the dunes via Snail Road, picnicking atop the dunes, exploring the remains of shipwrecks, and photographing the Pilgrim Monument in the distance (Figures 1.26 to 1.30).

Figure 1.26. Tourists posing for a picture atop a dune in 1914 and contributing to erosion (photo album, Cape Cod NS Archives).



Figure 1.27. Photograph dated 1911, likely taken along Snail Road (photo album, Cape Cod NS Archives).



Figure 1.28. Photograph dated 1911 entitled "Snail Road" (photo album, Cape Cod NS Archives).

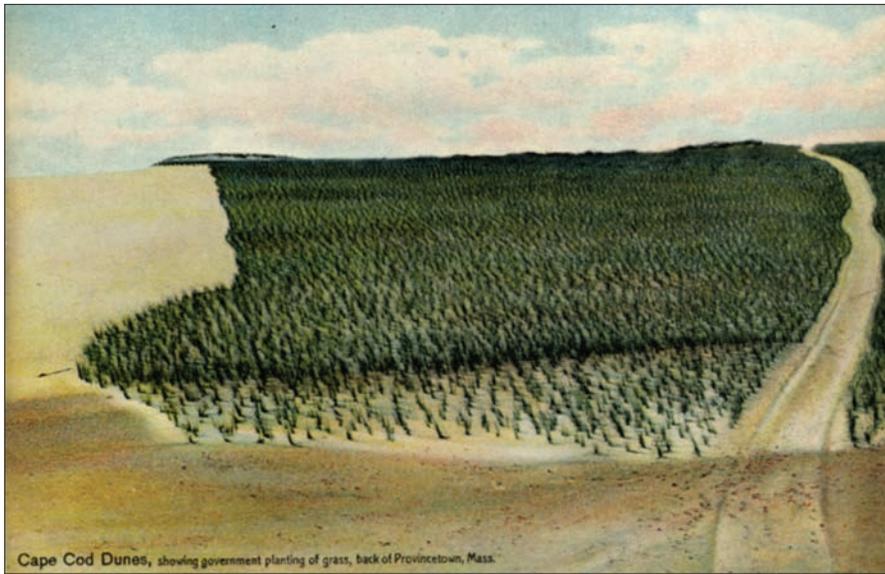


Figure 1.29. Postcard with one cent postage of Cape Cod dunes showing government plantings of grass, back of Provincetown in the early 1900s (Pilgrim Monument Archives, pc1126).



Figure 1.30. Postcard sketch of the dunes and outer beach in 1919, a remote area which was becoming an increasingly popular tourist destination (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

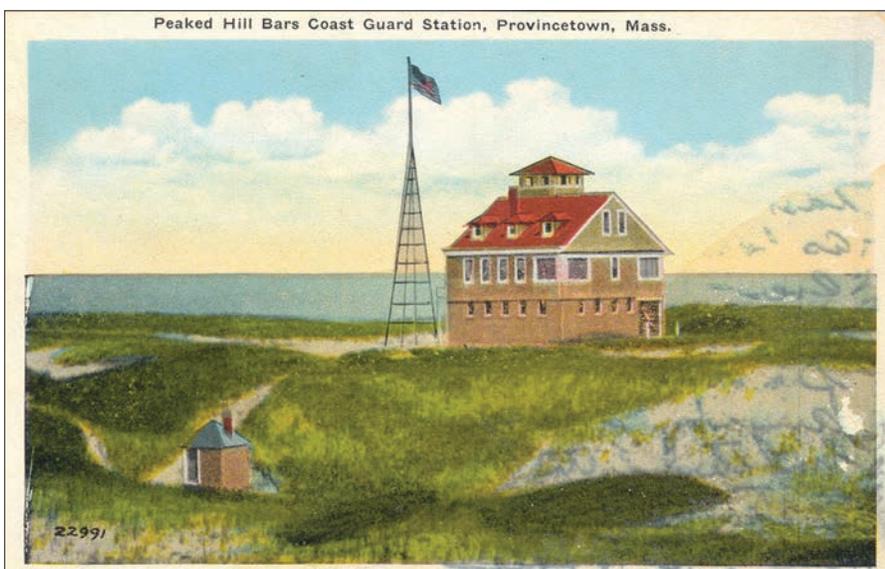


Figure 1.31. Postcard looking north at the Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station in its original location, likely sometime in the early 1920s. This station replaced the original Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station. Note the large flagpole and small building, possibly a communications building (Courtesy of James M. Clafin Collection).

U.S. COAST GUARD AND ARTISTS IN THE DUNES

Figure 1.32. Postcard looking west at the Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station and outbuilding, likely a boathouse, in their original locations, in the early 1920s (Courtesy of James M. Clafin Collection).



With the rising population of the Outer Cape and the growth of tourism, law enforcement increased and over time the surfmen's patrols of the back shore became a form of policing, in addition to life saving. In 1915 the U.S. Coast Guard adopted the USLSS and built the new Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station along the shore by 1918. The old Life-Saving Station was used as a summer residence until it was washed into the ocean in 1931. The new Coast Guard Station was a large three-story building with a viewing tower (Figures 1.31 through 1.35). To the west, a collection of small one-story cottages were

clustered together not far from the beach. Coast Guardsmen built these small shacks to house their families and guests, but also rented and eventually sold the buildings (Figure 1.36).

Meanwhile, in 1917 Europe was swept into World War I; and before long the United States was drawn into the conflict as well. Given the Cape's strategic location on the cusp of the Atlantic, both the Life-Saving and Coast Guard Stations



Figure 1.33. Postcard looking east at the Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station in its original location, 1920s. Routine access to the boat house (right of the station) weakened the foredune (Courtesy of James M. Clafin Collection).



Figure 1.36. Looking east at the Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station in its original location, c. 1930. This station replaced the original Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station. Coast Guardsmen built the cluster of associated buildings in the foreground, perched on the foredune, and used them as seasonal dwellings (Pilgrim Monument Archives, PA 0495).



Figure 1.35. View southeast of the Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station, c. 1920. Note the vehicle parked at right (Pilgrim Monument Archives).



Figure 1.34. Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station, c. 1920 (Cape Cod NS Archives).

were used for military purposes.¹³³ During the war the population of Provincetown continued to diversify, as immigrants and refugees fled Europe. The town was even compared to an unspoiled European fishing village, with still only a small number of visitors and a wealth of cheap places for students to stay.¹³⁴ Paris in particular contributed to an influx of artists, due in part to local Provincetown resident Charles Hawthorne's visit to that city in 1914.¹³⁵



Figure 1.37. Painting dated 1915 by Charles Hawthorne (1872–1930), founder of the Cape Cod School of Art, entitled “Crew of the Philomena Manta” (Courtesy of the Provincetown Library).

Association was founded in 1914 with a hefty 147 members in its first year. By 1916 Provincetown hosted five summer art schools and was attracting a variety of poets, novelists, journalists, and playwrights in addition to radicals, socialites, critics and bohemians, many of whom came from Greenwich Village in New York City. Local painters included Oliver Chaffee, Stuart Davis, Masden Hatley, Edward Hopper, Abraham Walkowitz, Dorothy Lake Gregory, Ross Moffett, Caleb Slade,

and Marguerite and William Zorach (Figures 1.38 and 1.39). Provincetown’s art colony was recognized as far superior to any other during the first half of the twentieth century. Contributing to the

Many of the tourists drawn to Provincetown were artists who found the vast natural environment of the dunes particularly alluring. Painters began summering there in the 1890s, and in 1899 Charles Hawthorne founded the Cape Cod School of Art with a focus on the varying effects of the Cape’s brilliant natural light (Figure 1.37). Ambrose Webster, a pioneer of Modernism, began his own Summer School of Painting in the town only a year later.¹³⁶

In response to the rapidly growing art community, the Provincetown Art

and Marguerite and William Zorach (Figures 1.38 and 1.39). Provincetown’s art colony was recognized as far superior to any other during the first half of the twentieth century. Contributing to the



Figure 1.38. Painting entitled “Dunes” painted in 1904 by Oliver N. Chaffee (1881–1944). Chaffee was an abstract figural painter who resided in Provincetown from 1913 to 1944 and studied at the Cape School of Art with Charles Hawthorne and others (Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 887.Pa86).



Figure 1.39. Ross E. Moffett (1888–1971) studied under Charles Hawthorne, was the husband of artist Dorothy Lane Gregory, and spent time in the dune shacks. A Provincetown local and widely recognized Modernist painter, Moffett's figures were often set in the vast dune landscape. Painting entitled "Impressions of Spring," no date (Courtesy of Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 1122. Pr91).

life of this community, among others, were playwrights Susan Glaspell and Eugene O'Neill, radical journalist John Reed, writers George Cram Cook and Mary Heaton Vorse, and socialite Mabel Dodge.¹³⁷ The Provincetown Players, established in 1915 by Susan Glaspell, Eugene O'Neill, and other Provincetown residents, quickly became a focus for the creative energy of countless locals. In addition the Beachcombers Club, founded a year later, and the Sixes and Sevens Coffeehouse that opened in 1920 served as popular hangouts.¹³⁸

The Provincetown Players were soon attracting some of the nation's most talented and creative performers to their modest plays, the first of which were staged out of people's private homes. The group performed a variety of American pieces, most of which were composed by its own members.¹³⁹ Eugene O'Neill was among the most prolific of the players and has been described as one half of "the core around which the lesser talents revolved;" the other half being Susan Glaspell.¹⁴⁰ In 1916 the company moved into a building owned by Mary Heaton Vorse on a Provincetown wharf, and here O'Neill's first play, *Bound East for Cardiff*, was staged. The group's popularity soared and only a few years later was performing year-round in the newly established Playwright's Theater, in New York City.¹⁴¹ In order to continue the town's performance tradition after the departure of the Provincetown Players, the Wharf Theater opened in one of the town's old fish houses in 1924.¹⁴²

Town theatrical performances were not only enjoyed by the local artists, fishermen, and sailors, but by rising numbers of tourists. During the late 1910s waves of outsiders began making the overland trek to visit the Cape's tip.¹⁴³ While some came for a day, a week or a few months, others came to live. Among the visitors were famous writers Sinclair Lewis, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and e. e. cummings, as well as artists Edwin Dickinson, Ross Moffett, and Karl Knaths (see Figures 1.39 and 1.40). Even as World War I raged overseas and Cape Cod underwent thorough fortifications against attack, Provincetown seemed to have a life of its own. Naval ships anchored in Cape Cod Bay. The Cape Cod Canal, completed in 1916, provided a safer alternative to navigating the Peaked Hill Bars and the potential threat of German U-boats along the outer coast. Yet all the while Provincetown was a kind of foil to the troubled world, representing a

lively contradiction to the rest of the country's apprehensions about the political turmoil in Europe. In particular the summer of 1916 was noted as one of alcohol, sexual freedom, casual morals, and social anti-conformism. Almost overnight Provincetown's new bohemian flavor was popularized that summer, as flocks of motorists, thousands of sailors from the U.S. Navy, and the usual artistic crowd swarmed the town.¹⁴⁴

Out on the back shore the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station quietly ceased operations in 1918, at the end of World War I. Yet, the buildings endured with a constancy only human care could provide. Hunting, fishing, and living in the dunes became a matter of pleasure and entertainment, rather than survival. Even as the migrating dunes continued to change the sandy landscape around them, structures in the dunes were maintained for the first time. Small clusters sprang up around the Race Point and Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Stations, as well as other spots along the back shore (see Figures 1.20 and 1.36). Many of these structures, like those which followed, were built close to the shore but behind the barrier dune, to increase their protection from the elements.

Nestled in a desert-like landscape scattered with only sparse vegetation, some surfmen and other dune inhabitants kept small gardens, chickens, or horses. Some fished, hunted, and gathered beach plums and cranberries from the bog areas of the dunes, as the Pamets had done before them. With the diking of old East Harbor and the creation of Pilgrim Lake, Provincetown became accessible by rail and road. High winds and coastal storms persistently reshaped the coastline and covered the roads with sand, while repairs to the roads and the relocation of buildings became routine. Before long the value of the dunes had shifted from life

saving to inspiration and personal growth, a movement driven not only by an emergent artistic community but the boom of American tourism.



Figure 1.40. Edwin Dickinson (1888–1971) studied under Charles Hawthorne in the summers of 1912 and 1913 and later became a teacher himself. Noted for his hazy landscapes washed with light, Dickinson resided in Provincetown for many years and stayed in Hazel Hawthorne Werner's shacks. Painting dated 1930, entitled "Back Beach Truro" (Courtesy of Provincetown Library).

DUNE SHACK HABITATION, 1919 TO 1961

The use of lifesaving structures for seasonal retreats signaled the initial use of the dune area as a place for entertainment and artistic inspiration rather than the highly regimented responsibilities associated with life-saving operations. At the same time Coast Guard facilities shifted to a new structure further inland, which was actively managed until the late 1940s. A winter storm claimed the original life-saving station in 1931, but the shed-like ancillary structures were salvaged. Many of these small buildings were relocated, and most became summer dwellings for the families of some of the earliest coastguardsmen, as well as a growing number of artists, writers, actors, and others drawn to the dune landscape. These included poet Harry Kemp, who first occupied a shack in the mid 1920s and continued to dwell in the dunes until his death in 1960. A year later, the Cape Cod National Seashore was established, marking another major change in the ownership, management, and use of the shacks. In addition to the references used to describe earlier historical periods, records from dune dwellers and Robert J. Wolfe's *Dwelling in the Dunes* (2005) provided details on the use of the dunes during this period.

DUNE SHACKS AND DUNE DWELLERS

Having previously lived in a grass hut on the dunes, Eugene O'Neill took up summer residence in the old Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station in 1919. Each summer from that year until 1924, he helped to muster increasing enthusiasm for the unusual atmosphere and artistic value of the dune landscape.¹⁴⁵ At the start of the twentieth century the Peaked Hill Bars area had been mostly deserted, with the surfmen of the Life-Saving Station representing the area's only permanent residents. Yet O'Neill's many visitors appreciated the wonders of this natural landscape, and envied his home. As it grew in fame, rising numbers of artists and other creative minds from Provincetown, New York, and elsewhere were drawn to the distinctive dune landscape. O'Neill's residence at the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station marked the beginning of this era of popularity, featuring the dunes as a place for summer homes and entertainment (Figure 1.41).

Tourism served as one of the most powerful catalysts for Provincetown's heightened influence on the back shore. Whereas some shacks had originally been built specifically for use by the families of Coast Guardsmen, soon the demand for dune rentals was prompted the construction of new shacks or the renovation of old Life-Saving Station buildings, including the Malkin/Ofsevit and Kemp shacks, and the Armstrong shack further east.¹⁴⁶ Swallowed by a landscape of meager human company, howling winds and a gaping sky, human loneliness on the back shore was difficult to avoid in those early years. This made most company a welcome change. Peaked Hill Bars Station Coast Guardsmen who built shacks

A HOME on the DUNES

By
JESSIE MARTIN BREESE

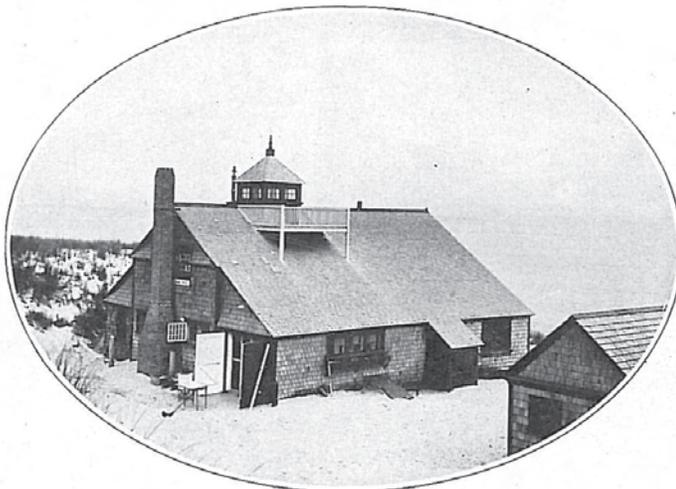
FAR out on Cape Cod, on the farthest point that touches the ocean, is one of the most interesting houses I have ever seen. Houses have been made from barns, and from old mills, but I doubt if any more original home, from the standpoint of initial use and homelike—but never houselike—flavor exists in the world than this house on the dunes.

Once this house was the coast-guard station, which is in itself enough to give it distinction. It was not satisfied with this, however, for it became the home of Eugene O'Neill, who is probably America's foremost dramatist today. His plays are apt ones to be written in such a house, since many of them are of the sea. The same lonely eminence that his plays have achieved, his house has also. No other houses are within miles of it, except the present-day coastguard station, which is some distance down the beach.

These are not ordinary miles, either, that separate this extraordinary house from the other houses in Provincetown. They are miles across slipping, sliding sand dunes—miles each one of which is worth at least three miles on hard ground. The dunes themselves offer nothing to the eye but desert grass, the sky, and the sand itself, burning as any desert, still, and unreal as these barren spots that are just off the beaten track always seem.

This is one side of the house that was once a coastguard station. The other side looks out on the ocean, blue, green, and purple always unless a dull day turns it many tones of gray. Ships pass along its horizon on their way to Europe and points along the coast. Almost at the very base of the house the sea rumbles and roars, and sometimes rages for admittance. The shifting sands change the landscape around the house from season to season much as the ocean changes its form and color ceaselessly from day to day. Except where the dune grass grows, the sand is never still. Ten years ago the Government abandoned this house as a station for its coastguard because the sea was making such inroads on the sands that they considered it unsafe. One is reminded of Edna St. Vincent Millay's joyous invitation, "Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand."

It is no palace, nor has it been furnished as such. Its charm lies in the fact that its furnishings have been kept as simple and as seamanly as possible without rank imitation of the sea. Few changes have been made in the house itself. The old boat room,



Sheltered by miles of sand dunes, and facing the sea, is the old Peaked Hill Bars coastguard station, which is now the home of Eugene O'Neill, dramatist of the sea

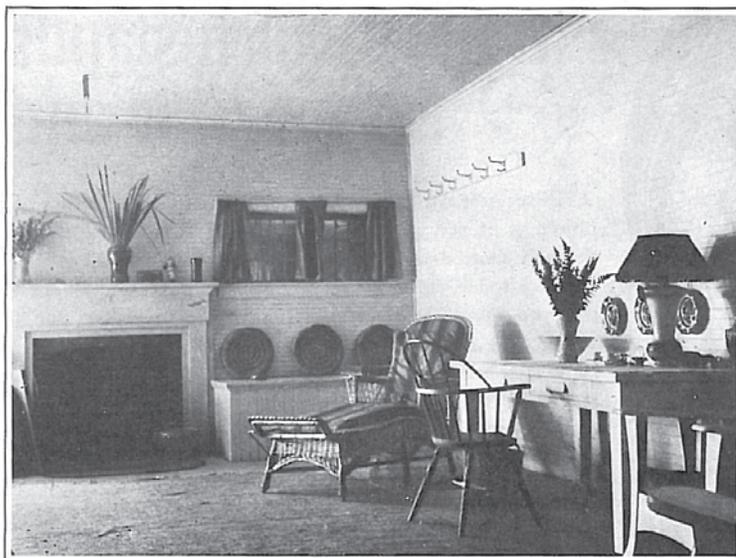
THE name of Eugene O'Neill is synonymous with the best in contemporary American drama. In his charming little house among the sand dunes of Cape Cod the playwright busies himself turning out such masterpieces as "The Hairy Ape" and "Anna Christie." The simplicity and charm of his home, which Mrs. Breese describes in this article, are quite in keeping with the forceful simplicity of his plays.—
THE EDITORS.

long and of huge proportions, has been closed in at the end where the boats were brought out to the sea. A fireplace has been added at the end of this room, and it is now the living room. The dining room is the same old galley that the coastguards used for mess, and opens on an informal plank terrace on the dune side.

A roomy corner pantry is as large as any ordinary kitchen. Both this and the kitchen open to the sea, which they seem to have taken for their color scheme in part, for some of the furniture and the trim have been painted a Chinese blue. The china has its pattern in the same color. The house throughout is painted white, just as it always was in the days when the captain in charge of the station maintained a sailorly cleanliness that called for white paint which could be scrubbed. The floor throughout is the same light Chinese blue, making a most effective floor for such a house. Such a background may sound unreal for a living room, but it is suitable to this erstwhile station of the coastguard, as no other treatment could possibly have been. The same stark simplicity of form and color was carried out in the furnishing of the room. This room that was for thirty years the boat room of a station that saw many a wreck in the years of its Government existence would certainly give physical expression to its distaste were furnishings of any elaboration used in it. Such unsuitability would never make a livable room. The worst wreck this station ever saw left twenty-seven corpses stretched across its length, when the sea had calmed in the morning, and the work of the guards was done.

That was more than a score of years ago, but a room that has seen such service will never accept gracefully a Gobelin tapestry of great worth and matchless beauty. Oriental rugs on that floor would be an unhappy anomaly.

Woven rag rugs of various sizes and woven rush rugs as well as more fittingly laid on its floors. Its walls are decorated colorfully with twelve-inch plates of Italian pottery. Two groups of three plates each are on either long side of the room. Over the fireplace is an enormous plate, three feet across, of the same sort, flanked on either side by two smaller ones, the same in size as those on the side walls. Each of these plates had a huge fish or two or three as its central decoration, and in color they are golden, yellow, and brown, with their decorations done in blues and reds typical of Italy. This color scheme is followed throughout the



In the living room golden yellow and blue twelve-inch plates are hung on the wall, and round rush mats used as buck rests on the chests carry out the scheme. Usually a three foot plate, flanked by two smaller ones, hangs over the mantel

Figure 1.41. Article depicting the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station as the "Home in the Dunes" of playwright Eugene O'Neill (Country Life, November 1923).

in the area during the first half of the twentieth century included Captain Frank L. Mayo, Frank Cadose, Raymond Brown, Joe Madeiros and Louis “Spucky” Silva, among others (see Appendix B for complete list of shacks and construction dates).¹⁴⁷ Visitors, family, and friends from Provincetown walked out Snail Road to use the shacks, where they usually stayed a few days to relax and fish (Figure 1.42 and 1.43).



Figure 1.42. Photograph in September 1921 of the original Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station surrounded by small structures along the foredune, as seen from the vicinity of Snail Road (Cape Cod NS Archives).



Figure 1.43. Portion of a map of the Province Lands and the township of Provincetown, 1920. A popular route to the backshore, Snail Road is visible extending north from the town between the letters O and W in “Provincetown” on the map. Another road extends across the dunes from the northwest end of Pilgrim Lake to the approximate location of the half-way house (Cape Cod NS Archives).

A notable benchmark in the development of tourism throughout the Outer Cape was the extension of U.S. Route 6 to Provincetown in 1926, bringing drastic improvements to land transportation in the age of the automobile. Following its construction collections of summer cottages sprang up at Pilgrim Beach, North Truro, Pilgrim Heights, and Great Hollow.¹⁴⁸ A paved loop road through the Province Lands and an air strip at Race Point encouraged more visitors.

Rental properties became increasingly common as artists flooded the town's fish houses, sail lofts, and barns. Social and economic activity in the region underwent a substantial shift, as industrial and fishing pursuits faltered and the region's population of permanent residents plummeted. Notwithstanding the local economy still clung for a while to marine-related activities such as fish freezing, canning, and oil processing.¹⁴⁹ Some Portuguese residents of Provincetown began cultivating cranberries, even as weir fishing dwindled in popularity.¹⁵⁰ As Provincetown tourism proceeded to thrive throughout succeeding decades, the permanent population of neighboring Truro dipped to a low of 513 in 1930.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, Provincetown's liberal values allowed its ethnically diverse community to prosper.¹⁵²

In the 1920s, a devoted following had formed by those using the buildings surrounding the Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station. While O'Neill occupied the Life-Saving Station, he also occupied a nearby workshop, which had been built by John Francis in about 1921. To the east were cottages built and owned by Coastguardsmen Captain Mayo, Frank Cadose, and Provincetown Chief of Police Charles Roger. Further east, restaurant owner Pat Patrick built a new shack near the halfway house.¹⁵³

An intense period of change and development ensued in the 1930s. In 1931 a coastal winter storm swept away the old Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station and several nearby buildings. Dune dwellers were forced to move salvaged structures inland and build new structures to replace those that were lost (Figures 1.44 to 1.47). Captain Mayo's shack was lost to erosion, while Charles Rogers



Figure 1.44. Looking northeast at the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station, falling into the ocean after a storm in 1931. Note the small cluster of associated buildings at right, some of the ancestors of today's dune shacks (Pilgrim Monument Archives).



Figure 1.45. View looking west of the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station falling into the ocean, after the winter storm of 1931 (Cape Cod NS Archives).

shack, then owned by Alice Malkin, was moved inland (Figure 1.48).¹⁵⁴ That same year the Coast Guard moved the Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station and boathouse about 660 feet inland near the relocated Malkin/Ofsevit shack.¹⁵⁵ Upon reconstruction the building was placed on a concrete foundation, which still remains at the site today. Soon thereafter, the Coast Guard constructed a new metal watchtower along the coast between the current locations of the Werner (Thalassa) and Chanel shacks, so as to provide access to a sea view. Though fairly unstable, this tower could still be climbed by Paul Tasha around mid-century, when he was a child.¹⁵⁶

The 1930s also witnessed the continued, unrelenting erosion of the coastline and an almost complete lack of vegetation throughout the inner dune landscape due in part to the increased use of the area. The severity of dune erosion in the early 1930s is recorded in an aerial photograph, taken in about 1932 (Drawing 1). Vast areas of the dune landscape are blanketed with windblown sand (Figure 1.49). Photographs from the 1920s and 30s show no efforts to stabilize the sand surrounding the buildings by using the techniques promoted in the nineteenth

century to protect the harbors—beach grass, tree, and shrub plantings and the laying of brush. The use of wood-slat sand fencing does not appear until the late 1950s.¹⁵⁷ Fence posts dotted the landscape, but were most likely associated with property lines (Figure 1.50).¹⁵⁸



Figure 1.46. View looking west after the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station fell into the ocean in 1931. Only the chimney and outbuildings remain (Pilgrim Monument Archives).



Figure 1.47. View looking south at a building falling into the ocean, c. 1931. This is likely one of the buildings associated with the Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving Station, possibly Frank Mayo's shack or the Braaten shack before it was moved from the beach and reconstructed around 1931 (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

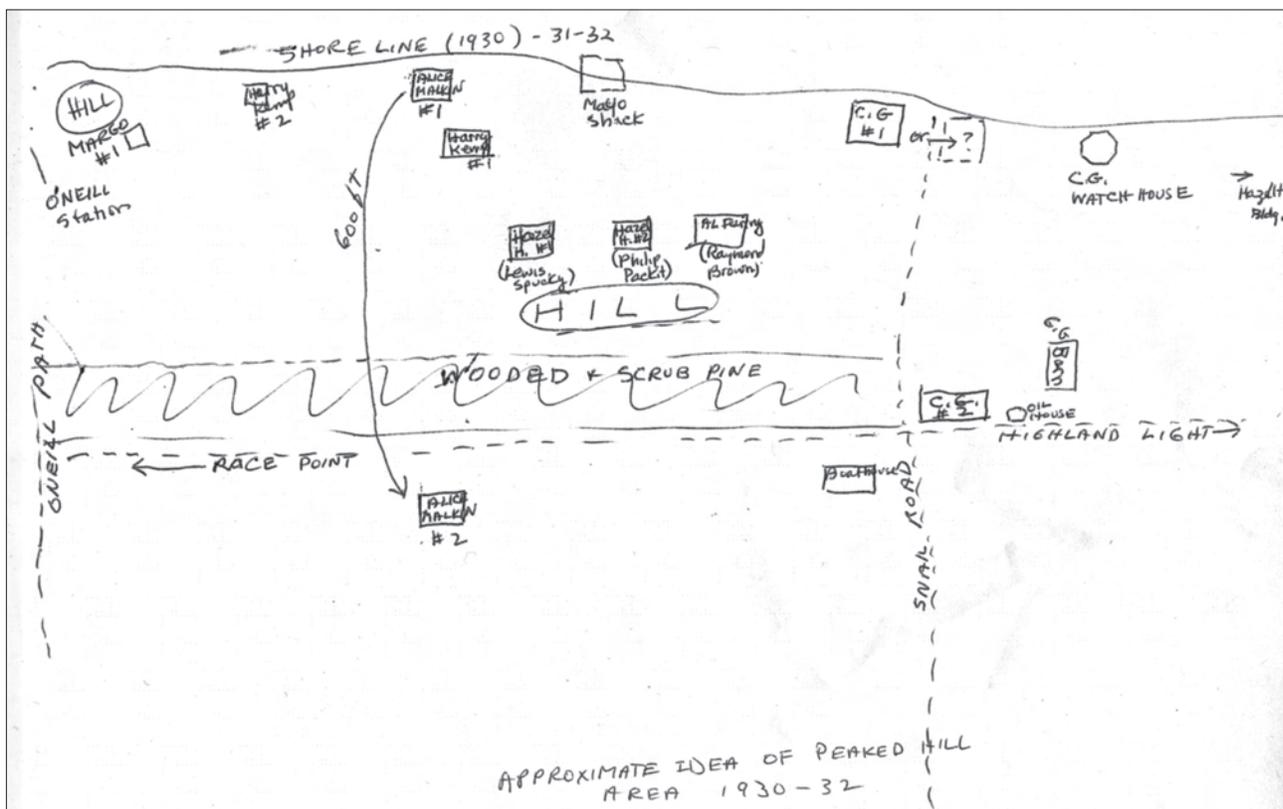


Figure 1.48. Sketch by Zara Malkin Ofsevit Jackson recalling the arrangement of the shacks in the central cluster by the Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station in the early 1930s, when several buildings toppled over the eroding cliff including the O'Neill (Life-Saving) Station and Mayo shack (Courtesy of Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).



Figure 1.49. Undated photograph of dune erosion along the backshore (Pilgrim Monument Archives).



Figure 1.50. Undated photograph of old fence posts and dune erosion along the backshore (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

Cultural Landscape Report
 Dune Shacks of Peaked
 Hill Bars Historic District
 Cape Cod National Seashore
 Barnstable County, MA

Period Plan c. 1932



National Park Service
 Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
 www.nps.gov/oclp

SOURCES

1. Circa 1932 aerial photograph from the Fairchild Aerial Camera Corporation, The Fairchild Model T-3A Five Lens Aerial Camera and Model B-7 Transforming Printer, New York, 1932.(Inventory #: RS1514) © Collection of Historical Scientific Instruments, Department of the History of Science, President and Fellows of Harvard College
2. Province Lands and the Town of Provincetown, MA Dept. of Public Works map, 1920 (Cape Cod NS Archive)
3. Sketch by Hazel Hawthorne Werner of the structures in the central cluster in 1933 as recalled in 1971 (Fearing Bessay Clemons Collection)
4. Approximate idea of Peaked Hill Area 1930-1932. Sketch by Zara Malkin Ofsevit Jackson (Fearing Bessay Clemons Collection)

DRAWN BY

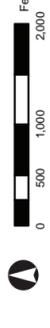
Laura Roberts,
 ArcMap 9.3, Adobe Illustrator CS3, 2011

LEGEND

- State lands boundary
- Dune route
- Dune shack location
- Ruins or remnants

NOTES

1. All features are shown at approximate scale and location.



Drawing #1

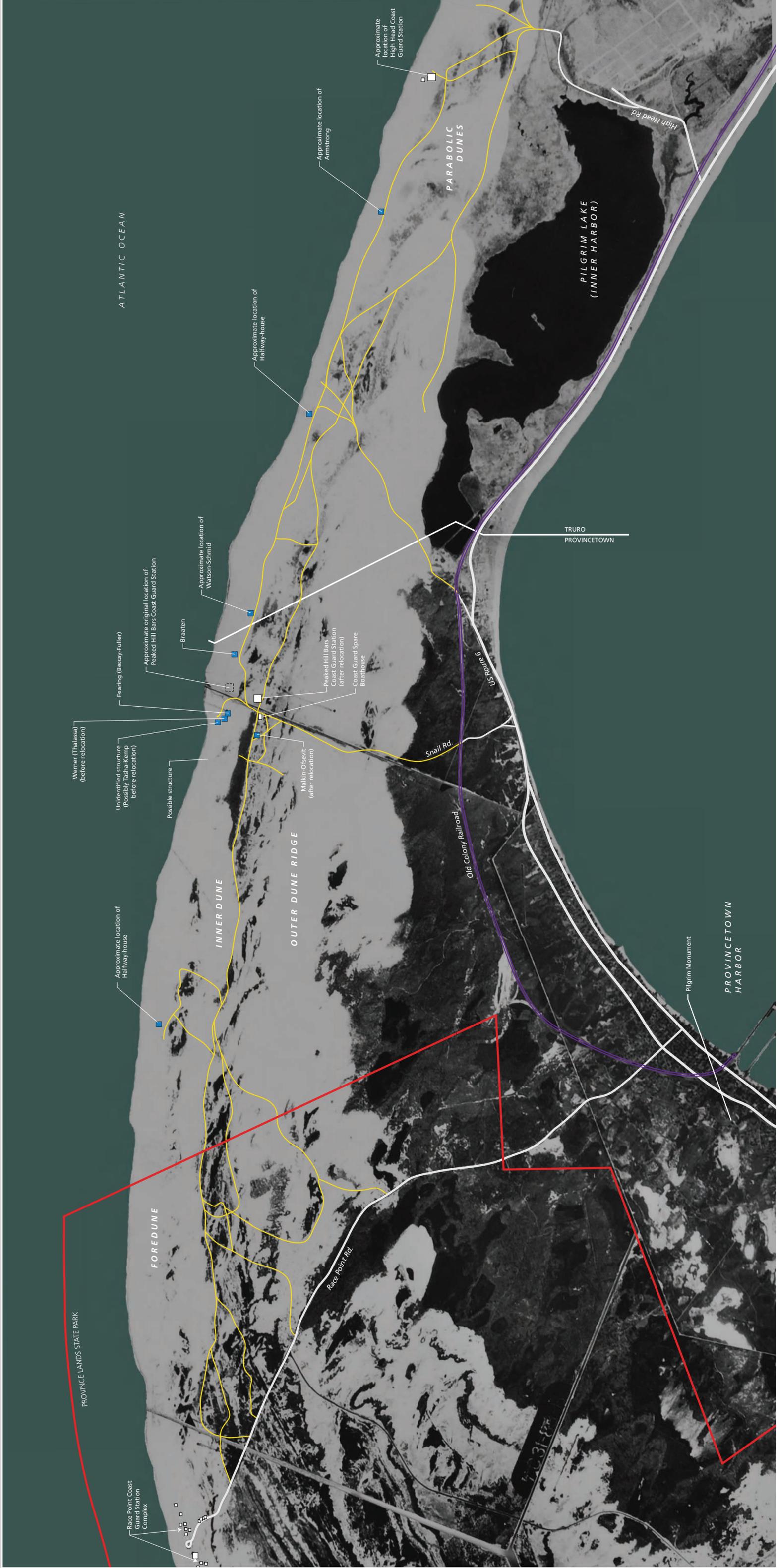




Figure 1.51. Untitled dune landscape by impressionist painter Heinrich Herman Pfeiffer (1874-1956). Pfeiffer worked in Provincetown and was known for his landscapes and urban coastal scenes (Provincetown Library).



SHACK BUILDERS AND DUNE ARTISTS

The fragility of the landscape did not discourage others from building additional shacks. At least thirteen new shacks were built in the 1930s by coastguardsmen and locals, including those now known as the Fleurant, Adams Guest Cottage, Adams, Champlin, Euphoria, Fearing, Thalassa, Braaten, Watson, Wells, and Jones shacks. Two additional shacks built in the 1930s are no longer extant—the Red Shack and Vevers-Pfeiffer-Giese shack stood along the back shore to the east in Truro.

Many of the new dune dwellers in the 1930s and 40s were artists, including John Grillo, Philip Malicoat, Jan Gelb, Boris Margo, Blanche Lazell, Bruce McKain, Ross Moffett, Frederick J. Waugh, Caleb Slade, and Ben Shahn. Some spent most of the summer in the shacks while other visiting artists such as Wolf Kahn and Heinrich Pfeiffer found the shacks to be compelling subjects for their work (Figures 1.51 to 1.54). Collectively, the artists transformed the back shore into a cradle of creativity.

Figure 1.52. Painting entitled "Hidden Lake" (no date) by Jeanette "Jan" Gelb (1906-1978), who worked in Provincetown from 1935 to 1978 and resided seasonally in the Margo-Gelb shack. A noted social realist painter in the 1930s, her style shifted toward surrealism and abstraction after she married surrealist artist, Boris Margo (Courtesy of Provincetown Art Association and Museum, 162).



Figure 1.53. Oil painting, c. 1948, entitled “My Shack in the Dunes” by Wolf Kahn (1927-), who is widely recognized for his landscapes in oil and pastel and for his combination of realism and color field. An early work, Kahn worked in Provincetown and in the dunes in 1948, 1953-54, and 1956 (Courtesy of Provincetown Art Association and Museum, Gift of the Artist, 566)

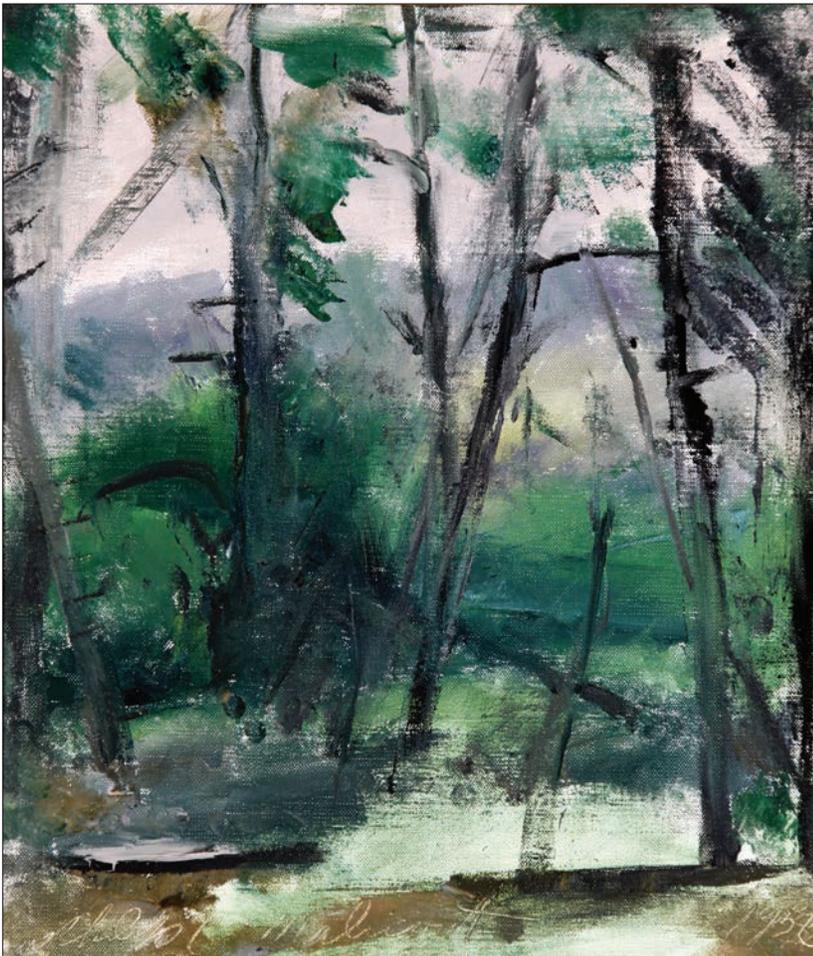


Figure 1.54. Noted for his highly atmospheric landscape paintings, Philip Malicoat (1908-1981) was a representational artist who began studying with Charles Hawthorne in 1929. Malicoat painted this oil on canvas, “Back Shore” in 1956 (Courtesy of Provincetown Art Association & Museum, 332.Pa78).

Shack construction slowed in the early 1940s, most likely due to the outbreak of World War II. During the war, the Peaked Hill Bars area once again served as a strategic location for use by the military. The recently decommissioned Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station, in its inland location near the Malkin/Ofsevit shack, was reclaimed by the Coast Guard to be used as a lookout. At the same time, the Braaten family leased their shack to the United States government for use as a mine testing station.¹⁵⁹

Though the tip of the Cape acted like a shield for the safe passage of vessels through the Cape Cod Canal and Cape Cod Bay, it remained relatively immune to the coastal fortification and industrial development witnessed elsewhere during these years. United States Geological Survey maps from 1944 show 23 structures as dots, plus the Coast Guard Station and boathouse, almost evenly spaced along the outer beach (Figures 1.55 and 1.56). Photographs from the 1940s show the relocated Coast Guard Station, the introduction of electrical lines and telephone to the station, and its abandonment by the late 1940s (Figures 1.57 through 1.60).

Shacks constructed during the 1940s included the Cohen, Malicoat, Margo/Gelb, Chanel, and Fowler shacks. An additional shack built in the 1940s is no longer extant, the Quonset shack near the Jones shack to the east in Truro. All of the shacks currently in the district were built by the 1940s, the last being the Fowler shack, which was constructed in 1949 (Figure 1.61) Another shack, no longer extant, appeared in the early 1950s near the Fearing and Fowler shacks. Esther Hill and her husband Gerald Hill, neighbors of the Fowlers in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, towed a trailer to the dunes in 1950. The following summer, they constructed a porch alongside the trailer, and in 1952 constructed a prefabricated cottage, assembled by a builder from Hyannis, in place of the trailer. Esther Hill later sold the cottage to Josephine Ford.¹⁶⁰

The dynamic dune environment necessitated repairs due to winter storms or vandalism, movement of shacks due to sand and erosion, reconstruction after fire, or in some cases, additions to accommodate more family members (Figures 1.62 through 1.64). In the late 1940s, the Fearing shack was almost buried on one side and the pilings completely exposed at the other end (Figures 1.65 and 1.66). A bulldozer operated by Jim Enos regraded the area to liberate the shack and reconfigure the adjacent dune. Jean Cohen relocated the Cohen shack further east, though it was later moved again further inland. Several other shacks were moved inland in the 1940s and 50s including the Adams Guest Cottage, Euphoria, Margo/Gelb, Malkin/Ofsevit, Thalassa, Braaten, and Wells shacks. While some were moved short distances, others were moved onto tracts held by different owners.¹⁶¹

In many cases those who originally rented structures from Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guardsmen eventually became primary dune shack caretakers. Otherwise most structures were transferred through family lines, by way of close relatives, while



Figure 1.55 and 1.56. Map (above) of Provincetown showing dune shacks, vehicle trails, and Snail Road. Map (below) of North Truro showing dune shacks, vehicle trails, High Head Coast Guard Station and the location of Pilgrim Spring, 1944 (USGS 1944).



Figure 1.57. High Head Life-Saving Station, which later became a U.S. Coast Guard Station boat storage and communications buildings in the 1940s, with a pole supporting electric and telephone lines (Cape Cod NS archives, Gushee Collection).



Figure 1.58. View south of the relocated Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station in the late 1940s (Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).

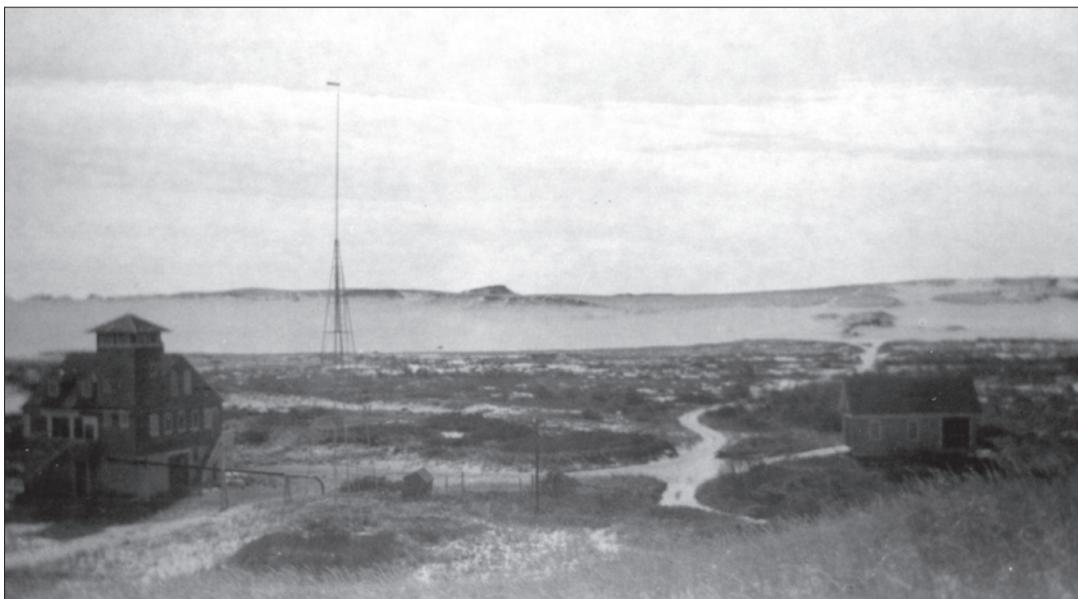


Figure 1.59. View south of Snail Road, the relocated Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station, tower, and boathouse, decommissioned in the late 1940s (Fowler Album, Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).



Figure 1.60. View east Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station, decommissioned and abandoned in the late 1940s (Cape Cod NS Archives).



Figure 1.61. View southeast of the relocated Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station at right and the Fowler shack at center in the late 1940s (Fowler Album, Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).



Figure 1.62. David Armstrong repairing a window of the Armstrong shack in its original location in 1948 (David and Connie Armstrong Collection).



Figure 1.63. View southwest of three shacks in the central cluster, 1946. The shack at left is the Fearing shack in its current and original location with Al Fearing on the roof. The shack at center is Thalassa in its original location. The shack at right collapsed in the late 1940s or early 1950s (Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).



Figure 1.64. Shack repairs and clothesline at the Fearing Shack, 1950s. Jim Enos, Al Jr. (or Alfee), Al, and Dorothy (or Doe) Fearing (Fowler album, Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).



Figure 1.65. View west of the Fearing shack in 1950. One end of the shack is buried in sand, while the other is eroded (Fowler album, Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).

some buildings constructed in the 1930s came to be cared for by close friends of the original users, as in the cases of Harry Kemp, Ray Wells, and Hazel Hawthorne Werner.¹⁶² The Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station was abandoned in the 1940s and burned in the mid 1950s.

Other structures that had disappeared by the end of the 1940s were the Coast Guard watch tower and the third shack that stood by the Fearing shack, most likely a shack built by Coast Guardsman Joe Madieros (see Figure 1.63).



Figure 1.66. View north of the Fearing shack in 1950. The west side is severely eroded while the other end is buried in sand (Fowler album, Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).



Figure 1.67. View northeast of Art's Dune Taxi and Fearing shack, 1952. Al Fearing is standing by vehicle and Doe Fearing is standing next to taxi owner Arthur Costa (Fowler album, Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).

Following World War II the area's focus on tourism intensified and Provincetown's artist population steadily grew. Arthur Costa, a local Ford dealership employee, established a dune taxi service in 1946 (Figure 1.67). Costa's service was at first a modest enterprise, and he greatly improved access for dune dwellers as well as tourists. When the tourist boom hit in the 1950s demand soared and Costa expanded his business accordingly. Before long he was buying more automobiles and hiring additional drivers. At one point his tours were even featured on national television.

As the popularity of automobiles soared, railroad service to the Outer Cape declined and finally went out of service in 1959.¹⁶³ Industrial activities also dwindled in favor of roadside shops, motels, and restaurants. Provincetown's giant plants fell out of use and were either demolished or converted to other uses. For example, the Consolidated Weir Company Cold Storage was converted into apartments in the 1960s and 1970s before becoming the current Ice House Condominiums complex.¹⁶⁴ A network of roads cut through the dune landscape allowing shack owners access to the beach and other dwellings (Figure 1.68). Snail Road remained a popular corridor for pedestrian access from Provincetown (Figure 1.69).

Figure 1.68. Aerial view looking southeast, showing (from the foreground receding into the distance) the Fleurant shack, Adams-Guest Cottage and the Adams, Champlin, and Malicoat shacks, in 1950 (NPS NER Archives).



DUNE ENVIRONMENT AND DUNE WRITERS

Annabelle Jones, who began summering in the dunes with her husband in the 1940s, wrote of the pleasures found in “an environment that appears barren but which is actually rich.”¹⁶⁵ Her meaning implied not only a wealth of living things but of interesting and often foreign objects. By her own estimate Annabelle Jones’s collection of beach stones weighed around 200 pounds, and she and her husband also discovered Native American artifacts in the dunes. Using lumber found on the beach, they constructed a dry well food refrigerator dug a full six feet into the ground. In addition, Annabelle and her husband enjoyed “what is edible on the dunes such as: wild peas, beach plums, cranberries, rose haws, blueberries and raspberries.”¹⁶⁶ In the reliably strong wind they flew kites on the back shore, and made candles from bayberry wax. Once a week she and her husband would go to Provincetown for mail and supplies, and occasionally engaged in largely unsuccessful fishing attempts.¹⁶⁷ By comparison, photographs from the Fowler family album attest to other, more successful fishing expeditions along the back shore (Figure 1.70).

As hinted by the Jones’s experience, the charming dune landscape and the buildings in it were put to many uses over the years, from revelry to solitude and artistic inspiration. The large number of famous American artists and

creative thinkers who have visited the Peaked Hill Bars area over the years stands as a testament to the unique nature of this environment. In addition to those already mentioned, playwright Tennessee Williams often visited Provincetown and is said to have “put the final touches” on his play *A Streetcar Named Desire* while living in a dune shack, around 1950.

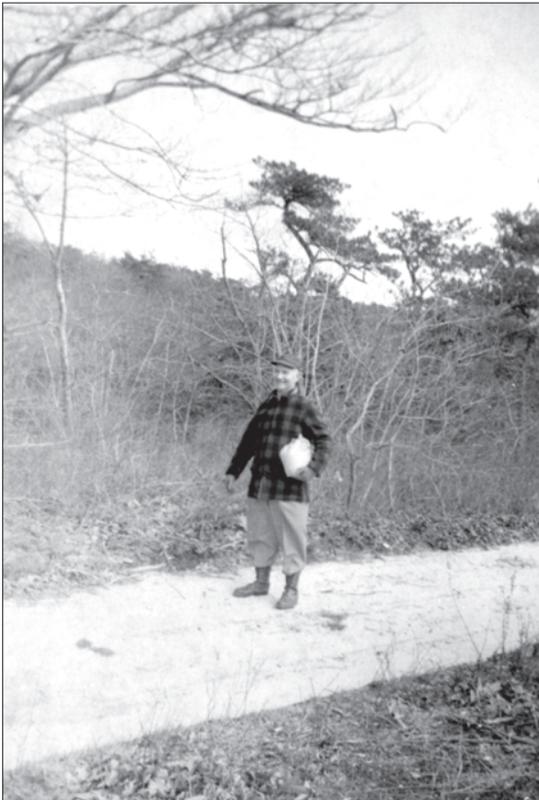


Figure 1.69. Stan Fowler walking on Snail Road in 1950, which was lined with young pines and maples (Fowler album, Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).



Figure 1.70. Jim Enos with bass while fishing on the backshore with Charlie, Lou, and Stan Fowler, 1951 (Fowler album, Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).

Apparently Marlon Brando also made his way to Provincetown, possibly by hitch-hiking, and was drawn all the way out onto the dunes to visit Williams and audition for a lead role in the Broadway play. Another well-known American author, Jack Kerouac, spent time in the Werner (Euphoria) shack in 1950 and there wrote some of his book, *On the Road*.¹⁶⁸

Over the second half of the twentieth century the artist, singer, and actress “Frenchie” Chanel used the dunes as a source of inspiration. Josephine Del Deo remembers how Frenchie

often sat on the main wharf in summer to hawk her charming dune scenes and harbor vistas that graced a delicate sea scallop shell or a sturdy clam shell ashtray. More often, she saved her delightful interpretations of Provincetown to display at appointed hours outside her dune shack when her loyal friend, Art Costa, brought his dune buggy customers to see a “real dune artist” and take home a souvenir.¹⁶⁹

Other regular dune dwellers had their own particular patterns for using this unique landscape. From mid-century on the cranberry bogs tucked between the dunes were regularly picked of their fruit by shack users, an enterprise often led by Leo Fleurant, who for a long time kept a horse on the dunes.¹⁷⁰ Locals also picked the beach plums growing along the back shore, went fishing and hunting, and collected sea clams from the ocean.¹⁷¹ Some dune dwellers entertained themselves by celebrating the Pilgrim’s arrival at Provincetown with a “wash day every year for many years” (Figure 1.71). Likely conceived sometime around



Figure 1.71. Harry Kemp theatrically celebrating the Pilgrim’s landing in Provincetown, c. 1950s (Driver 2004: 16).

mid-century by Harry Kemp, this custom was remembered rather humorously by Josephine Del Deo:

Sunny Tasha pinned them all in and sent them off in the biting November winds to record a remembered moment of history, her huge iron wash pot drawing up the rear guard of the little column of celebrants.¹⁷²

For others, the simple act of wandering the dunes was the most meaningful part of their life in the dunes. Miriam Hapgood DeWitt, among others, strode and painted in the dunes and said: “The dunes have thrilled me, held me in their spell. Countless times have I walked them, drawn and painted their wind-sculptured shapes, and felt transported into another world.”¹⁷³ Similarly local Dan Lewis, who worked at the Provincetown public library for fifteen years, “spent as much time as possible wandering in the dunes.”¹⁷⁴

Countless other Provincetown residents and artists have similarly frequented the dunes on foot, each for their own reasons, and some out of simple necessity.¹⁷⁵ For years most dune dwellers were forced to walk both short and long distances across the back shore in order to reach the shacks, or at least until dune taxis and buggies became more common in the 1950s and 1960s. Anne Arsenault fondly remembered her own trek out to the Red shack, when she was a child:

We, of course, felt that dragging everything across the sand in blankets, pillow-cases, or sheets was quite difficult, especially for small children. But we were on an adventure, visiting the wilderness where we rarely saw anyone.¹⁷⁶

However, it was not long before increased levels of human use and traffic on the back shore began making a mark on the natural landscape. The Peaked Hill, after which the area and its coastal sandbars were named, was itself gradually eroded away to nothing as a result of human use. Once the area’s tallest barrier dune which towered over the Kemp and Margo/Gelb shacks, this mass of sand was split in two by a single footpath sometime in the 1960s. As this track deepened the dune on either side eroded away, until the hill disappeared. In the process, sand blown from its peak and sides buried a nearby wetland.¹⁷⁷

LAND OWNERSHIP AND TOURISM

Many of the shacks stood on a single 251-acre parcel of land in Provincetown, or Tract 08-1036, which was originally owned by E. Bennett Beede.¹⁷⁸ Among these were the Werner (Euphoria), Margo/Gelb, Malkin/Ofsevit, Fowler, Fearing/Fuller/Bessay, Kemp, Chanel, Werner (Thalassa), and former Hill/Ford shacks. For many years Beede allowed shack users to squat on his land, but began charging them rent when his taxes rose around 1947.¹⁷⁹ Another privately owned parcel of land squatted upon by dune dwellers was that of Edwin J. and Junia M. Hannah, in Truro. The Hannahs had inherited this portion of the back shore, which was originally awarded to the family through a royal grant from the British Crown back

in the eighteenth century. Residents of Sandwich, Massachusetts, they negotiated with the users of the Jones and Armstrong shacks for taxes and lease fees during the 1950s but apparently did not collect from the three additional buildings on their property, the Watson, Wells, and former Schmid shacks.¹⁸⁰ Coastal storms continually reshaped the back shore and required shack relocations.

As tourism in the nearby towns thrived, the value of the dune shacks rose. During the 1950s and 1960s Provincetown's art community grew and changed with the times, as a renewed wave of painters and writers lent the town a beatnik atmosphere. Previous to World War II, the Provincetown Art Association had been the only institutional setting for the exhibition of art in the region. After the war the Association continued to mount noted exhibitions of abstract art, some of which were compared to those of New York City, and touched off a new movement of commercial art and display in Provincetown. By the late 1950s the town had more than two dozen galleries and craft shops. The cultural vibrancy of the 1910s was remade in the image of the sixties, as Provincetown's streets thronged with "beards, thonged sandals, tattered blue jeans, black peasant skirts, and shoulder-length haircuts."¹⁸¹ The town also swarmed with intellectuals such as Edmund Wilson, Alfred Kazin, Philip Roth, Daniel Aaron, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., some of whom frequented the dunes as a place to escape from the constant bustle.¹⁸²

During these years the back shore continued to be a kind of foil to Provincetown, and a strong contributing force to the town's growth and success. Due largely to the landscape and natural beauty represented by the nearby dunes, the town rose to become a leading icon of American art. Ronald A. Kuchta supports this idea in his description of Provincetown's popularity:

As an historic old fishing village at the end of a long peninsula surrounded by blue sky and a wild desert-like landscape of dunes, it offered brilliant light, fresh air and the drama of weather and sea. It especially appealed to the romantic nature and free spirit of artists. . . . Something about the intense sunlight reflected off the sea and the dunes for the impressionists; the fraternity of artists and the "picturesque" subject matter for the realists; the energy of nature and existential apartness for the abstract expressionists, seemingly had much to do with their vitality in this venerable New England town.¹⁸³

The boom of tourism throughout the nation during the early twentieth century meant that Cape Cod's Great Beach, or the roughly 30 miles of shoreline along the Cape's outer arm, had by the 1950s become one of the East Coast's last untouched beach areas. During the preceding few decades "almost every attractive seashore area" along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts had been "pre-empted for commercial or private development. The Outer Cape remained a final New England outpost of the "outstanding values desirable and suitable for extensive seashore recreation."¹⁸⁴

Recognizing its value, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts took additional measures to protect the dune landscape. Between 1955 and 1956, Pilgrim Spring State Park and Reservation was established in Truro. Shacks within the reservation were condemned, but the Commonwealth did not actively remove them. Meanwhile at a national level, conservationists were tackling how to protect the fragile Cape Cod landscapes and the region's quaint maritime way of life.

THE DUNE LANDSCAPE IN 1961

USGS maps from the mid 1950s, sketches by Hazel Hawthorne Werner in 1971, and aerial photographs illustrate the changes that took place in the central cluster of dune shacks between the 1920s and 1960s (Figures 1.72 through 1.82 and Drawing 2). Two state park properties, the Province Lands and Pilgrim Spring State Park respectively covered the western and eastern portions of the Outer Dunes. The central portion included the remains of the Peaked Hill Bars Coast Guard Station. The open expanse of the Peaked Hill Bars, initially marked by a single Life-Saving Station, was dotted with a string of shacks clustered behind the barrier dune. Though originally inhabited by surfmen and their families, a growing number of structures came to host casual hunters, fishermen, artists, and other seekers of leisure and solitude. The Peaked Hill Bars Life-Saving and Coast Guard Stations initially stood out as substantial structures in this setting, but were gone by mid century. For a time the telephone and electrical poles associated with the Coast Guard Station traversed the dunes from Provincetown.

The isolated and barren atmosphere of the back shore remained largely unchanged. From the dune shacks visitors and artists enjoyed views of the ocean or the Provincetown Monument, or simply appreciated the soft and ever-changing shapes of the surrounding dunes. The mostly seasonal population of dune dwellers also continued to collect berries from the bogs, and natural curiosities from the beach. Small gardens or playground areas appeared in the vicinity of structures along with clotheslines, birdhouses, pumps, and outhouses (see Figure 1.64). Marked by footprints left in the sand, visitors wandered the dunes, typically hiking up to high points to appreciate the scenery and observe wildlife. The open vistas across the back shore and out over the Atlantic were interrupted only by the Pilgrim Monument in Provincetown and later the round shape of the Truro water tower to the south.

Harry Kemp's death in 1960 marked the loss of the "Poet of the Dunes" and a cultural icon, having lived on the back shore since the 1920s (see Figure 1.71). Similarly, other dune dwellers were reaching an age where they could no longer stay in the dunes. Some passed their shacks on to friends and relatives, while other shacks were abandoned and quickly deteriorated in the harsh elements. Several locals became caretakers for multiple shacks, deterring vandals and carrying out shack repairs.



Figures 1.72 and 1.73. Map (above) of Provincetown showing dune shacks in the western and central portions of the historic district. Map (below) of North Truro showing dune shacks in the eastern portion of the historic district, vehicle trails, High Head Coast Guard Station, and the location of the newly established Pilgrim Spring State Park (USGS 1955).

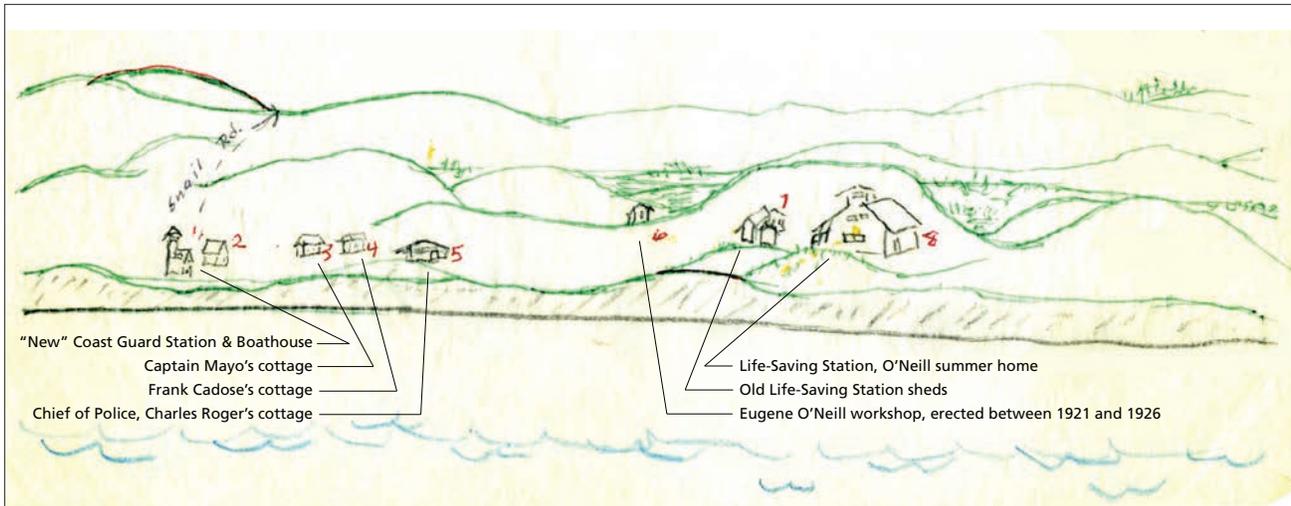


Figure 1.74. Sketch by Hazel Hawthorne Werner showing the structures in the central dune shack cluster in the 1920s as recalled in 1971, annotated by Olmsted Center using Werner's notes (Courtesy of Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).

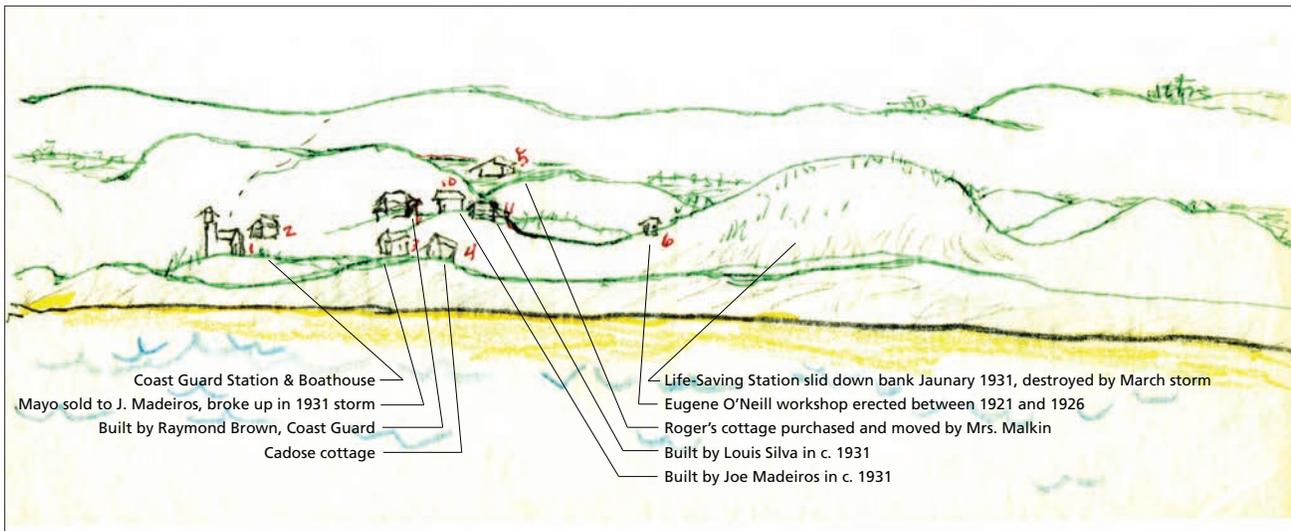


Figure 1.75. Sketch by Hazel Hawthorne Werner of the structures in the central cluster in 1933 as recalled in 1971, annotated by Olmsted Center using Werner's notes (Courtesy of Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).

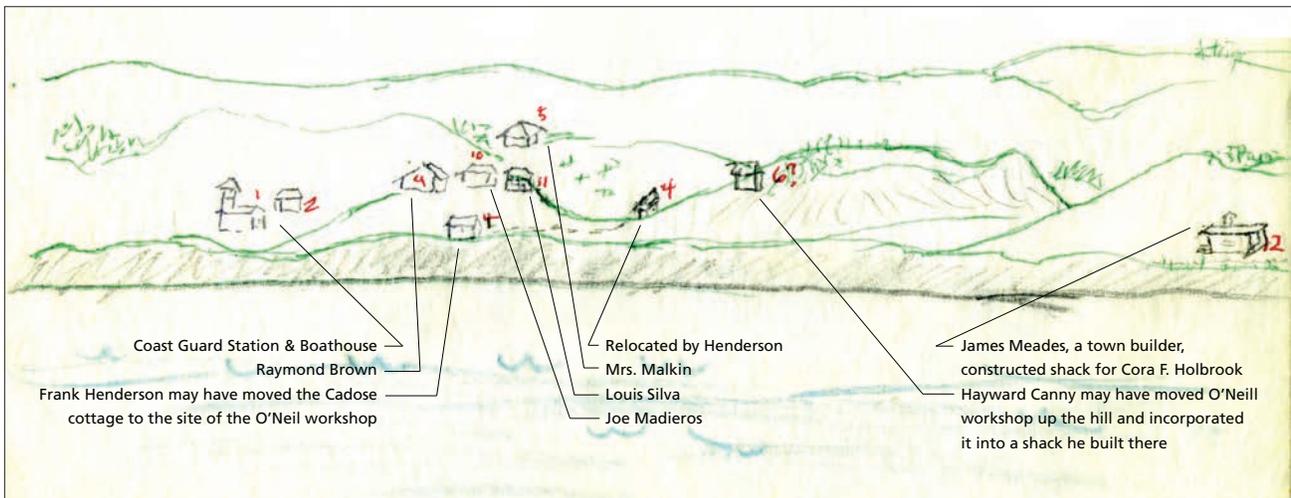


Figure 1.76. Sketch by Hazel Hawthorne Werner of the structures in the central cluster in 1939 as recalled in 1971, annotated by Olmsted Center using Werner's notes (Courtesy of Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).

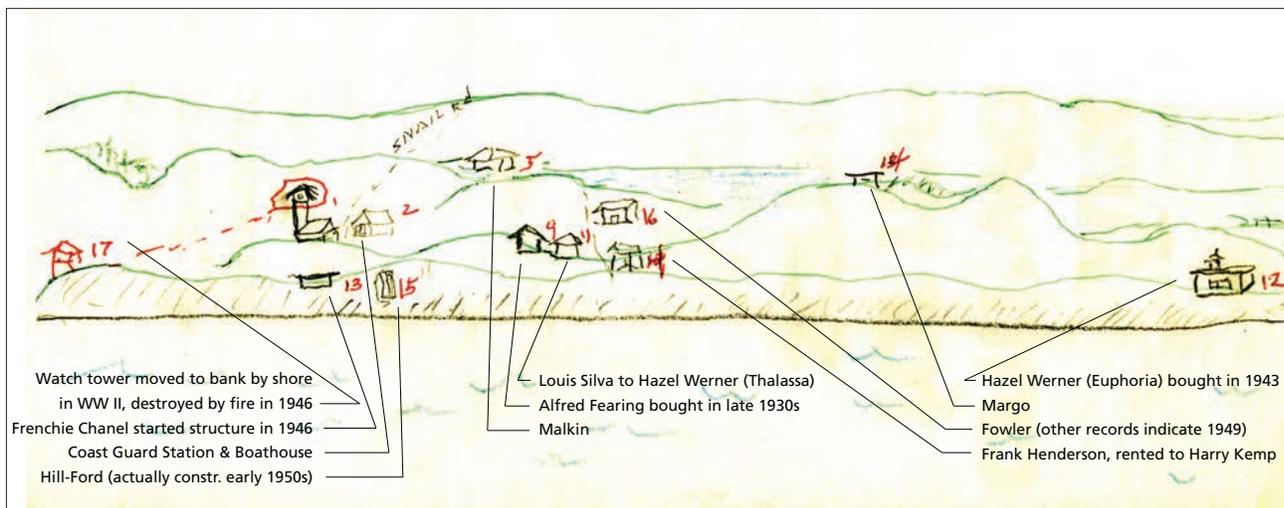


Figure 1.77. Sketch by Hazel Hawthorne Werner of the structures in the central cluster in the 1946 as recalled in 1971, annotated by Olmsted Center using Werner's notes (Courtesy of Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).

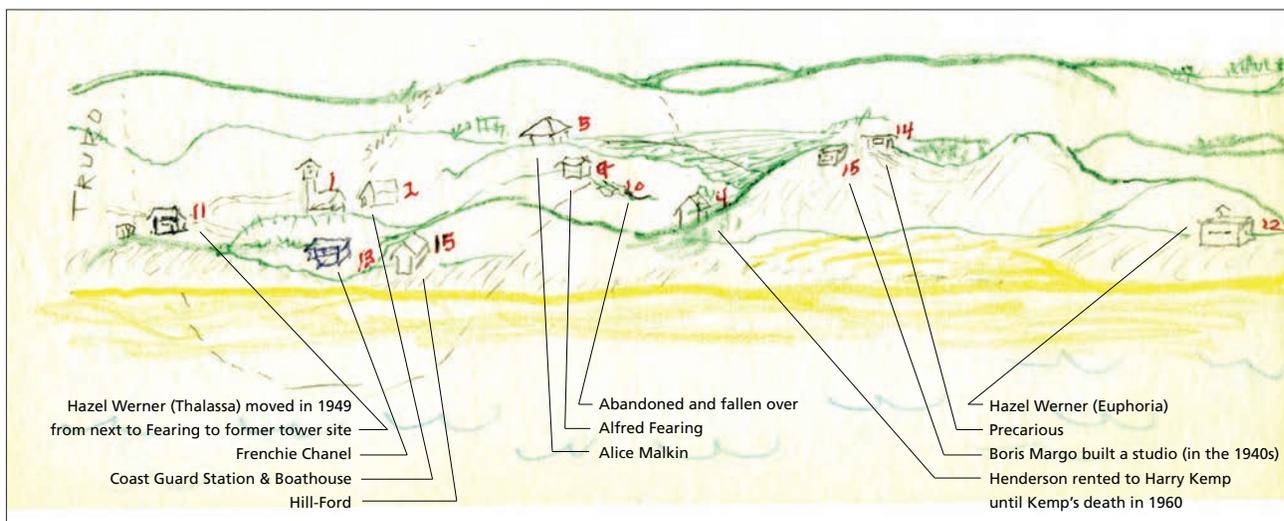


Figure 1.78. Sketch by Hazel Hawthorne Werner of the structures in the central cluster in 1950 as recalled in 1971, annotated by Olmsted Center using Werner's notes (Courtesy of Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).

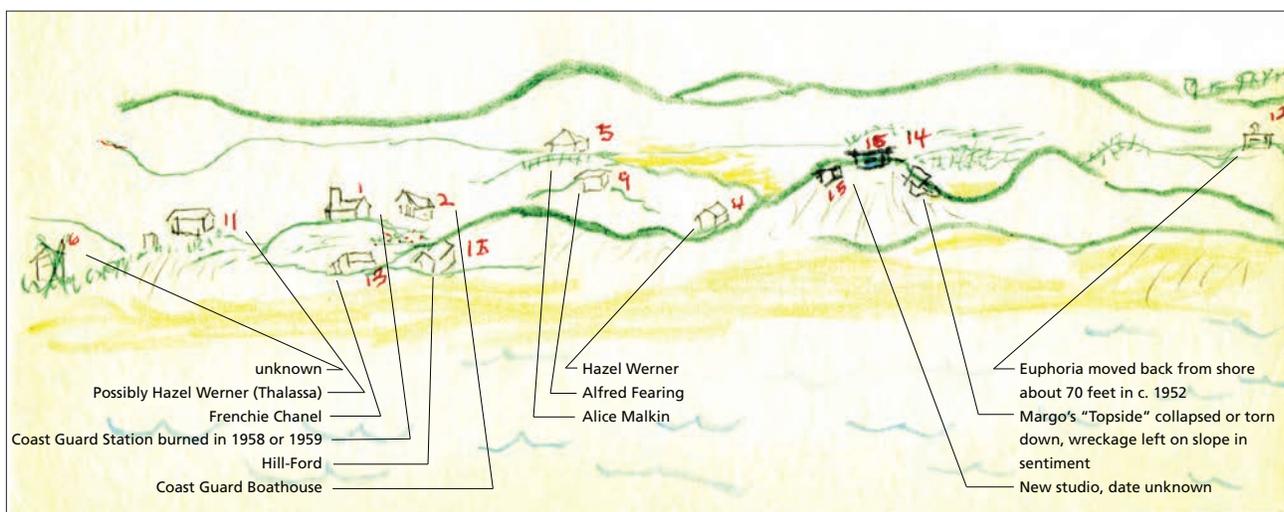


Figure 1.79. Sketch by Hazel Hawthorne Werner of the structures in the central cluster in 1960 as recalled in 1971, annotated by Olmsted Center using Werner's notes (Courtesy of Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection).



Figure 1.80. Section of 1960 aerial photograph showing the western cluster of shacks and sand drives. The Cohen shack in its 1960s location is at the upper center of image (Cape Cod NS Park Files, 1960).



Figure 1.81. Section of 1960 aerial photograph showing the central cluster of shacks and sand drives. The Braaten shack in its 1960s location is at the upper center of image (Cape Cod NS Park Files, 1960).

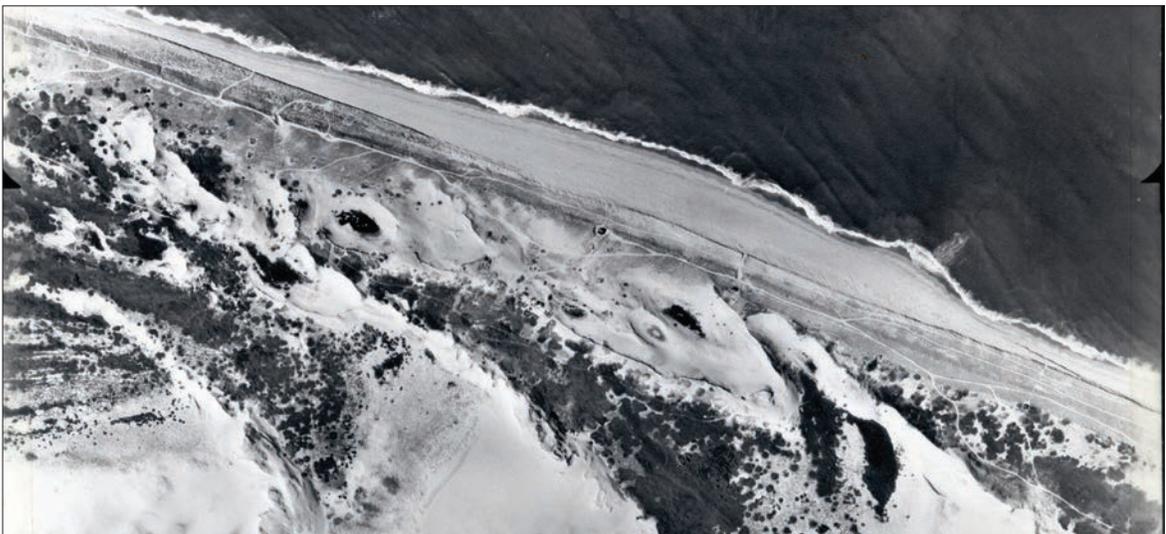


Figure 1.82. Section of 1960 aerial photograph showing the eastern cluster of shacks and sand drives. The Armstrong shack in its original location is at the upper center of image (Cape Cod NS Park Files, 1960).

Cultural Landscape Report
 Dune Shacks of Peaked
 Hill Bars Historic District
 Cape Cod National Seashore
 Barnstable County, MA

Period Plan 1961



National Park Service
 Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
 www.nps.gov/olcp

SOURCES

1. Aerial photographs, 1960
2. USGS Quad map, 1955
3. Map of "Over-Sand Vehicle Routes," 1968

DRAWN BY

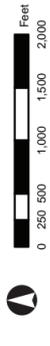
Laura Roberts
 ArcMap 9.3, Adobe Illustrator CS3, 2011

LEGEND

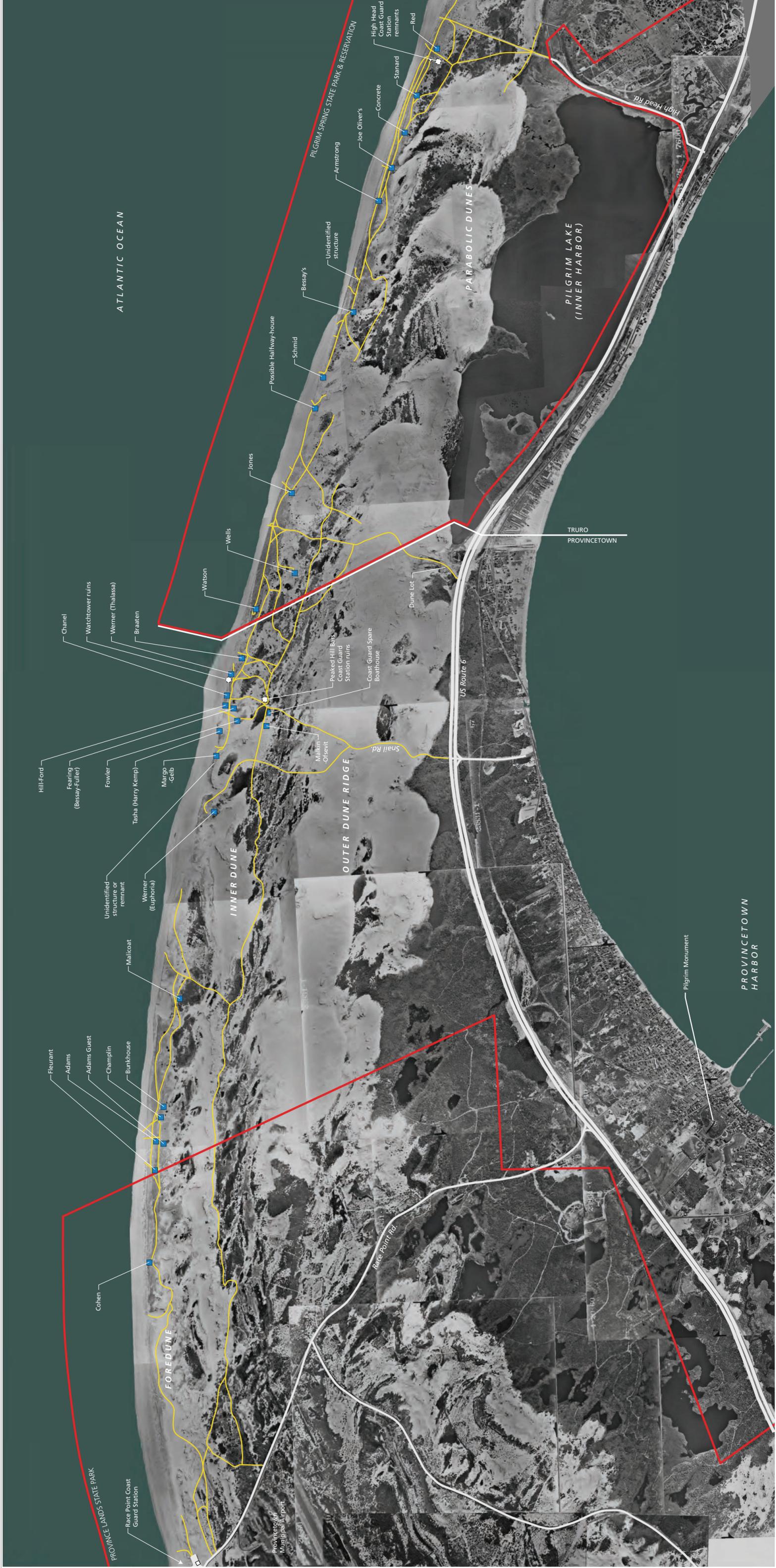
- State lands boundary
- Dune route
- Dune shack location
- Ruins or remnants

NOTES

1. All features are shown at approximate scale and location.



Drawing #2



ESTABLISHMENT OF CAPE COD NATIONAL SEASHORE, 1961 TO 1991

After the establishment of Cape Cod National Seashore in 1961, the National Park Service assumed responsibility for managing the dune landscape. The reluctance of dune dwellers to relinquish rights to the shacks combined with an increase in tourism, resulted in decades of turmoil surrounding the dune's fragile natural and cultural resources. Sources for this period include photographs, maps, National Park Service correspondence files, Candice Reffe's *From the Peaked Hills* (1988), Josephine Del Deo's *Compass Grass Anthology* (1983), and her survey "The Dune Cottages of the Peaked Hill Bars," completed in 1986. Photographs and correspondence from private collections provide information on individual shacks, though detailed histories are included in the Analysis and Evaluation chapter.

MANAGEMENT OF THE DUNES BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

As a result of increased tourism and commercial development, a growing interest in preserving the Outer Cape as a national treasure resulted in the establishment of the Cape Cod National Seashore in 1961. Cape Cod National Seashore was officially signed into law by President John F. Kennedy on August 7, 1961, as Public Law 87-126. Its stated purpose was in part to

preserve the nationally significant and special cultural and natural features, distinctive patterns of human activity, and ambience that characterize the Outer Cape, along with the associated scenic, cultural, historic, scientific and recreational values.¹⁸⁵

Creating the Cape Cod National Seashore required a new approach. The lands identified for protection were knit into the existing communities. A strong connection between these areas and the local communities would be disrupted by the federal government assuming complete ownership and control. The act to establish the National Seashore, drafted in 1959 and enacted on August 7, 1961, allowed the National Park Service to adopt an innovative approach for land preservation. Applying what became known as the "Cape Cod Model," the National Park Service defined park boundaries, but did not acquire all of the private land within the boundaries.

The act included provisions for local businesses to continue operating and for towns to continue managing some beaches, providing local revenue.¹⁸⁶ The act also contained a provision that allowed for continued hunting, fishing, and berry picking on federal lands.¹⁸⁷ In essence, the intent of the bill was to show a "concern for Cape Cod and its people" while making the park a reality.¹⁸⁸

The Cape Cod Model engaged towns through a National Seashore Advisory Commission and entrusted town governments to enact zoning ordinances that would restrict development and maintain current uses within the park boundaries.¹⁸⁹ Sixteen million dollars of federal funds were allocated for land acquisition through condemnation, but with options and with flexibility to enact over a number of years, so as to be less disruptive to the local economy.¹⁹⁰ The owners of “improved properties” constructed before September 1, 1959 where the land was held in the same ownership as the dwelling had the following options. They could sell their property outright to the federal government, sell with the right to retain occupancy for twenty-five years or for life, or with an option to pass the property to an heir or other buyer if the property met the zoning or other requirements of the act.¹⁹¹ In short, properties needed to meet specific criteria in order to be exempt from condemnation: predate 1959, possess a deed for the structure and land, and be improved. The dune shacks, however, presented an immediate challenge. Without plumbing or electricity, they were not considered improved property. Furthermore, deeds needed to show that the dune shack occupants owned both the structure and the land beneath it, which was not the case for most shacks, particularly those that had been moved.

Creating the park required 3,600 separate land transactions, with some parcels as small as one half acre in size. Many private inholdings, 660 in total, were retained with the park. By 1981, the federal government authorized and expended an additional 24 million dollars for land purchases, resulting in a park covering 27,000 acres, of which thirty percent remained in state, town, and private ownership.¹⁹²

LAND OWNERSHIP IN THE DUNES

The Province Lands of Provincetown and Pilgrim Spring State Park in Truro were authorized to become part of the emergent Cape Cod National Seashore in 1962. The title to the Province Lands State Reservation was conveyed on April 2, 1963 and the Pilgrim Spring State Park parcel was transferred to the United States government in 1966.¹⁹³ Only the Cohen shack is currently located in the former Province Lands, but the Watson, Wells, Jones, Armstrong, and former Schmid, little Bessay, Oliver, Concrete, Stanard, and Red shacks all once stood in Pilgrim Spring State Park (Figure 1.83). The land for this park had been acquired by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from Edwin J. and Junia M. Hannah back in 1955, pursuant to Chapter 523 of the Acts of 1955. Upon the establishment of the state park in 1956, the state ordered the removal of structures from the property, but apparently made no further attempts to enforce the removal as shacks within the park continued to be seasonally occupied. Similarly, as the back shore land in Truro and Provincetown passed over to federal management, most of the existing and now lost shacks were actively used.

Although public use of the dune landscape was popular from the very beginning, it took the National Park Service several years before any attempt was made to address treatment and use of the dune shacks. Discussion among dune dwellers over the transfer of the back shore to Cape Cod National Seashore management thus did not pick up until the late 1960s. Almost immediately it was a contentious issue, in no small part because of a general discontent among many Cape Cod residents about the extensive development of local beach areas in the form of cottage colonies at this time.

Established to preserve the natural landscape for public recreation and use, the National Seashore had a difficult time dealing with private ownership of seasonal cottages, which they deemed to be unimproved properties. In particular, the park did not at first recognize any remarkable difference between the shacks in the dunes of Provincetown and Truro and the countless other clusters of commercial cottages springing up by the dozens along the Cape Cod coast. Indicative of some opinions on the subject were the words of State Commissioner Charles H.W. Foster, who in 1962 said of the Peaked Hill Bars dune shacks: “In our judgement, the buildings are not suitable for year-round habitation, are lacking in sanitary facilities, and are so unsightly that they should be removed in advance of any public usage of the property.”¹⁹⁴ So the long debate over dune shack use within Cape Cod National Seashore began.

A series of lawsuits against the National Park Service began in the late 1960s and continued through the 1970s and even into the 1980s. Many of the most serious

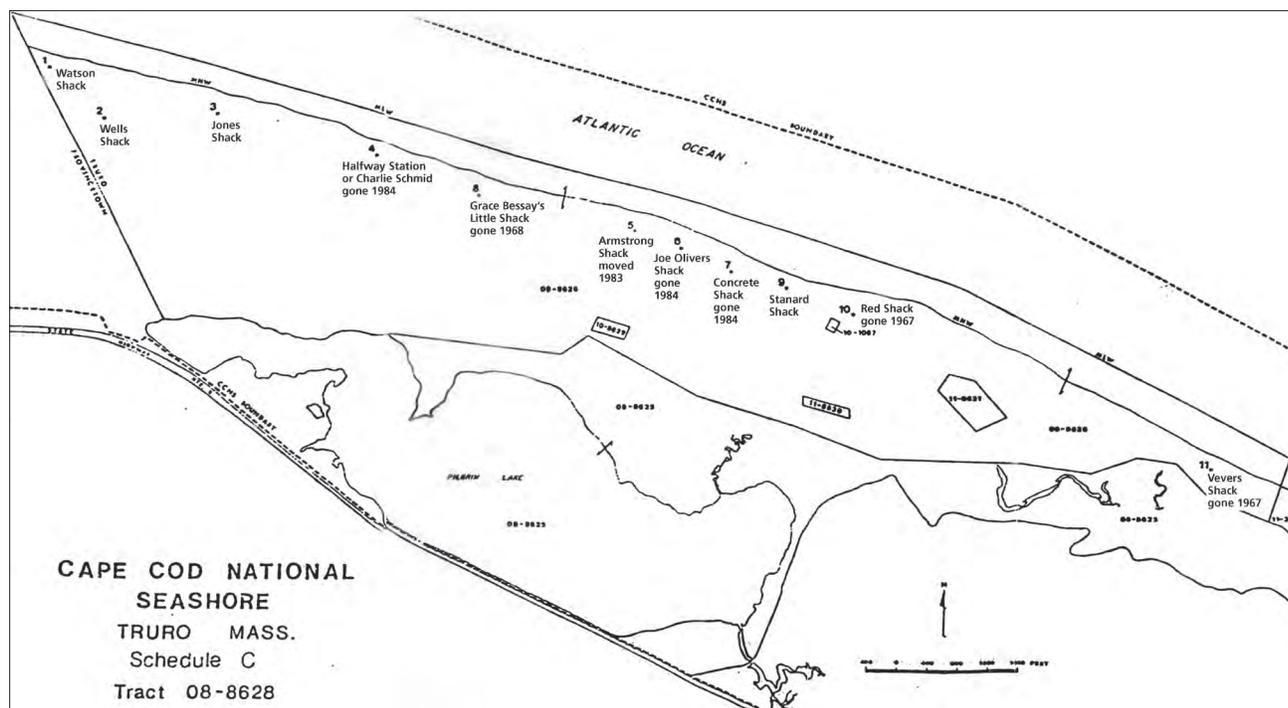


Figure 1.83. Map of the former Pilgrim Spring State Park in the 1960s with possible dune shack locations. The High Head Coast Guard Station was located near the Red Shack (Base map and initial notes from Fearing-Bessay-Clemons Collection, annotations added by the Olmsted Center).

issues surrounding the shacks stemmed from land ownership and rights of use. Since the construction of the early fishing shacks, squatting in the dunes had long been a common practice. In contrast to previous owners, the National Park Service took a much more proactive approach to the use of its land. Thus Charles H.W. Foster recounted in 1962 how the property surrounding a shack was

taken by eminent domain in 1956 under the provisions of Chapter 523 of the Acts of 1955. As a courtesy to the occupants, the order of taking specifically exempted any structures located thereon and provided a period of six months during which time the buildings could be removed or relocated by the owners. To the best of my knowledge, the buildings have not yet been removed, and in the past we have informed the property owners that their occupancy of these structures would have to cease when steps were taken to utilize and develop Pilgrim Spring State Park for conservation and recreation purposes.¹⁹⁵

GREAT BEACH COTTAGE OWNERS ASSOCIATION

In 1962 dune occupants and their supporters formed the Great Beach Cottage Owners Association with the goal of preventing the federal government's acquisition of the dune shacks along the back shore.¹⁹⁶ Ironically united in their love of the isolation offered by the dunes, inhabitants came together in support of their common cause, to affirm their shack rights and their right to be alone.¹⁹⁷ In a bulletin circulated by the Great Beach Cottage Owners Association sometime in the 1960s, the association's lawyer advised dune dwellers carefully on how to proceed:

Conversations with "friendly" park officials or letters to Park authorities invariably contain unwitting statements which tend to jeopardize owners' rights. The only safe rule is to make no statements, answer no questions – merely say pleasantly: "My lawyer is handling all this. You will have to talk with him."¹⁹⁸

Even with the recommendation for cautious restraint, an outpouring of impassioned action to defend life on the dunes rapidly ensued. Pleas came from all directions, and in a cacophony of diverse voices, to defend the value of the shacks in the Peaked Hill Bars area. In a 1965 letter to Secretary of the Interior Stuart Udall, artist Marcia Marcus expressed her concern for the rights of shack users and the importance of the dune landscape thus:

The effect of renewal and identification with nature that takes place in this very private situation is a real necessity for those, who constitute a large percentage of dune dwellers, who often perform their intellectual or artistic work under great pressure.¹⁹⁹

Having rented the Werner (Euphoria) shack on the dunes in 1961, writer Norman Mailer agreed:

The way of the artist is curious and can never be determined, but is [sic.] is a fact that many need solitude and some of the greatest work done in America,

notably the early plays of Eugene O’Neill, have come from living in solitude in the dunes and shacks on the Back Shore of Cape Cod.²⁰⁰

Yet as unique and essential as they were, the dune shacks and the lifestyle associated with them proved difficult to fit into the vision of Cape Cod National Seashore. In a 1967 National Park Service appraisal, no less than twelve squatters were found living on the acres contained within the Beede tract. None of the shacks being used by them achieved the status of “improved property” because they failed to meet the existing habitation guidelines, meaning that they had no running water, plumbing, indoor bathroom, electricity or insulation. Civil Action CA 67-988-N of 1967 was completed for all land tracts tied to dune shacks, and the appraised values for each shack were set while dune dwellers’ cases were settled.²⁰¹ In the end each situation was unique, as users strove with varying determination to provide the necessary ownership documentation. On the whole, most dune dwellers settled quickly with whatever use and occupancy reservation the government offered. In the end, the Malicoat family was the only dune dweller to retain ownership of a shack deemed improved property and the land beneath the shack. The National Park Service allowed them to retain a deed for their shack and the surrounding three acres of land, in addition to Snail Road access rights in 1971.²⁰² The Malicoats also sold an additional seventeen acres of land near the Malicoat shack to the Cape Cod National Seashore that same year. Today this structure is the only surviving dune shack within the Peaked Hill Bars area that continues to stand on private land.²⁰³

TOURISTS, BEACH BUGGIES, AND DUNE STABILIZATION

In an effort to define the unique qualities of the shacks, artists and writers published numerous works on their unique sense of place. In 1983 Josephine Del Deo wrote of one such setting:

Outside, by the broken step, the silver blades of compass grass reflected the metal light of morning. Down in the hollow, the softest grey lifted slightly from the bearberry. Moss green and mahogany beach plums settled against the sheltering hill mixed with the bayberry and sumac. Chicadees [sic.], barely audible, greeted the sunrise, and beyond their cloistered bush, the dunes stretched out limitlessly pure without the shadow of a single, civilized sin.²⁰⁴

That same year, Del Deo wrote of a pair of arctic terns that raised their young in front of the Chanel shack during the nesting season, while sparrows sang from the rose hips by the door.²⁰⁵

At the time the Cape Cod National Seashore was created, the landscape in the Peaked Hill Bars area was suffering from a relatively high level of human use and abuse. Beach buggies and other vehicles swarmed over pristine sands, destroying trails and generating an endless maze of new dune routes (Figures 1.84 and 1.85).

The impact of tourism was most evident in the dunes along Route 6. A large dune near the Dune Lot Entrance Gate along Route 6 and northwest of East Harbor, was a particularly popular spot for families to visit around mid-century. Easily accessible from the main highway, the giant hill of sand provided hours of entertainment to a generation of children who slid down its side on jackets and sleds, only to clamber up to the top for yet another go (Figure 1.86). This spot came to be known as the Sand Bowl. The intense use of the area destabilized the dune, causing the sand to blow onto Route 6 and into East Harbor. The park eventually closed the area to the public sometime in the 1960s. The effect of tourism on the dunes was most visible along the Route 6, where loose sand blew onto the road corridor (Figure 1.87).

Beginning in the 1960s the National Park Service launched a series of dune stabilization efforts. In 1963 they purchased 30,000 linear feet of sand fence, and



Figure 1.84. View of beach buggies in the dunes on the back shore, as seen from above, c. 1960s (Pilgrim Monument Archives, pc 4167).



Sand Dunes—Cape Cod National Seashore

Figure 1.85. Vehicles and people in the dunes in about the 1960s (Pilgrim Monument Archives).



Figure 1.86. Postcard view of tourists enjoying “New Dunes Walk, Parking Area, Provincetown,” on foot, c. 1970 (Pilgrim Monument Archives, pc 0110).

installed 7,000 linear feet in the nearby Province Lands “for dune building.” The wood slat fence slowed the wind and captured the wind-blown sand (Figures 1.88 through 1.90). Ten acres

of beach grass were also planted by hand (Figure 1.91). Damaged dunes were repaired “by bulldozing sand fill approximately 500 cubic yards.”²⁰⁶ In October of 1964 the dunes of Race Point were sewn with about 650 plants, consisting primarily of salt spray rose (*Rosa rugosa*) and beach plum as well as some inkberry (*Ilex glabra*), blueberry (*Vaccinium angustifolium*), arrowwood (*Viburnum dentatum*), and shadbush.²⁰⁷ From 1964 to 1966 the National Park Service continued to plant American beach grass and install fencing to rebuild the dunes in Provincetown and Truro.²⁰⁸

Although the Cohen shack is the only Peaked Hill Bars dune shack that stands within the revegetated portion of the Cape Cod National Seashore, these planting activities manifest a general shift in attitude on the back shore, toward active stabilization of the dunes. Among dune dwellers, the ongoing maintenance of buildings was a familiar refrain, necessitated by the ever-shifting sands and

constant exposure to weather. For instance, in 1963 Frank Henderson wrote of how a storm had

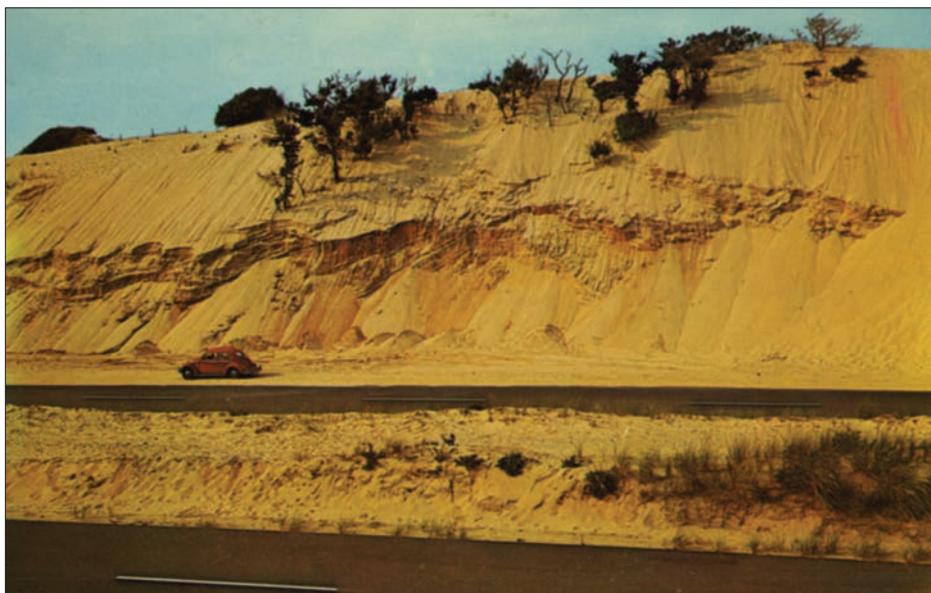


Figure 1.87. Sand accumulation along Route 6 in about the 1960s (Pilgrim Monument Archives).



Figure 1.88. Winter view of sand fencing constructed to reinforce the dunes, likely sometime in the 1960s (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

moved much of the sand near the Jones shack during his absence of only a few months:

Boy, what sand had moved about during those gusts of 60, 70, 80 and 100 mph – the entire section had changed, but, to my delight, the old backhouse, plus its connecting structure, had done a good job, in holding that hill. . .²⁰⁹

The return of seasonal visitors to the beach each summer always meant repairs from

the damages wrought by winter storms and unrelenting sand. Many shack users employed innovative techniques to monitor sand erosion. For example, Annabelle Jones and her husband stacked fish netting they found on the beach on top of piles of weeds and brush. At one point they covered about an acre using this technique, and reported that after the period of about three years the sand had begun to stabilize.²¹⁰

The creative initiatives of dune dwellers often complemented ongoing efforts by the National Park Service, who by 1965 was training employees from around the country on the maintenance of sand dune landscapes. One such “Dune Stabilization Session” was held in Georgetown, Delaware in September 1966. Having had experience with this issue the foreman of the Cape Cod National Seashore, Joseph Stephens, contributed to this meeting.²¹¹ By the 1960s wood slat sand fencing extended across eroded sections of the foredune and surrounded

many of the shacks.

Despite efforts to manage sand, shacks were susceptible to being buried, and sometimes quite quickly. The dunes near the Fearing shack, which had grown in the 1950s, continued to collect sand. The Chanel



Figure 1.89. Postcard view looking south over Pilgrim Lake of sand fencing in the dunes, circa 1960s (Pilgrim Monument Archives, pc 1353).



Figure 1.90. Sand fencing in the dunes, circa 1970s (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

shack was buried in the 1970s, and was subsequently built on top of in 1976.

Persistent issues with blowing sand and the near burial of Route 6 in the 1980s prompted the National Park Service to continue its stabilization efforts by planting large areas of the Peaked Hill Bars vicinity and the dunes around Pilgrim Lake with beach grass.²¹²

PROVINCE LANDS VISITOR CENTER, VEHICLE ROUTES, AND VISITORS

The dedication of the new Province Lands Visitor Center near Race Point took place on May 25, 1969, before an audience of some 500 people. The center helped draw additional attention to the dunes and their fragile ecosystem, educating the public about the natural landscape and its history.²¹³ It also raised awareness of back shore wildlife, including sea birds, ducks, coyotes, rabbits, and deer. Water holes dug by coyotes could be found among the dunes.²¹⁴

The surge of tourists to the back shore was facilitated by cars and beach buggies, whose tires coursed through miles of dune area previously navigated exclusively by foot, horse or wagon. From January 1968 through September of that year, the National Park Service recorded a full 15 percent increase in visitors to Cape Cod National Seashore, or a total of 3,194,600 people. In its first year of service alone the new Province Lands Visitor Center drew over 210,000 visitors.²¹⁵ These unfamiliar numbers resulted in an over-taxation of park resources such as transportation routes and parking areas. For instance, the recorded use of beach buggies in 1967 increased



Figure 1.91. Section of dunes on the back shore recently planted with beach grass, likely sometime in the 1960s (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

by 22 percent (see Figures 1.84 and 1.85). In subsequent years, their popularity continued to rise.²¹⁶

Recognizing these effects, a 1968 letter to dune dwellers from National Park Service Superintendent Stanley C. Joseph addressed concerns about the preservation of the delicate dune landscape by outlining new regulations for navigating the area. Not only was an over-sand vehicle permit now required of all vehicle operators, but only certain mapped routes of access were allowed.²¹⁷ In order to more closely guide and control dune circulation, a pamphlet was issued called “Over-Sand Vehicle Routes.” The map included therein identifies six different vehicle paths traversing the back shore between Race Point and the edge of Truro and known as the Inner Dune Route, Beach Top Route, Beach Route, Beach Taxi Route, East Harbor/Pilgrim Lake Section of Inner Dune Route, and Snail Road (Figure 1.92). These routes were distinguished by wooden markers standing three feet high above the sand.²¹⁸ With all automobile traffic in the dunes restricted to permit use only, Art’s Dune Tours, Drifting Sands Dune Tours, and the Meadows Beach Taxi became the only way for tourists to visit the Peaked Hill Bars area by car (Figures 1.93 through 1.96). Art’s single taxi or two were eventually replaced by six 4 x 4 vehicles carrying out multiple dune trips per day, bringing thousands of tourists to appreciate the natural beauty of the back shore each month.²¹⁹

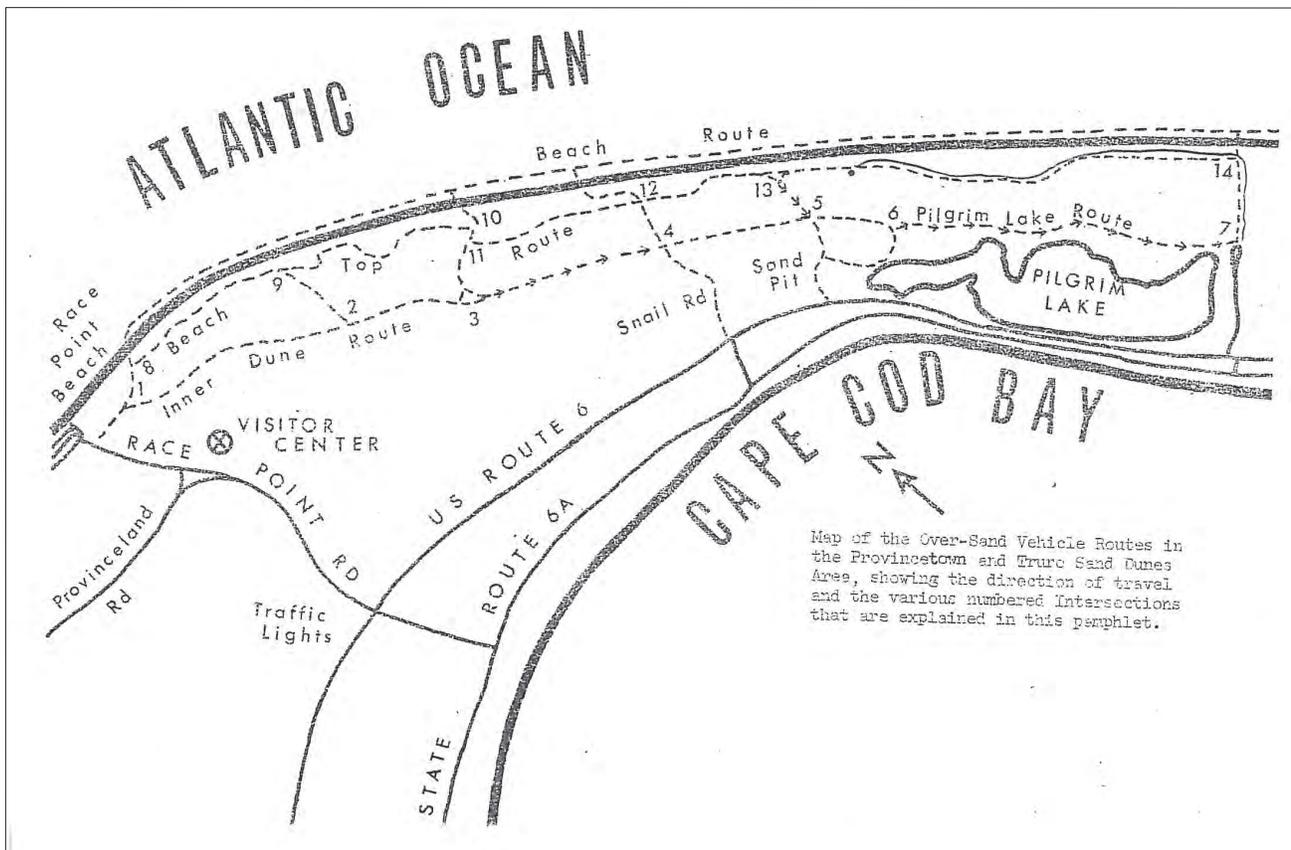


Figure 1.92. Map of the “Over-Sand Vehicle Routes” described in a 1968 pamphlet of the Cape Cod National Seashore (Provincetown History Project Archives).

In addition to providing a map of established dune routes, the 1968 pamphlet includes tips for use and recommendations for proper behavior in the dunes.²²⁰ Indeed, despite changes in access policies tourists and residents of nearby Provincetown regularly continued to make their way out to the dunes on foot. In the so-called “peak of hippiedom” in the late 1960s, “Provincetown was full of psychedelic drugs, hard drinking, and promiscuous sex” and at one point was even referred to as a circus.²²¹ The peaceful and secluded atmosphere of the dunes naturally served as a magnet for activities on the peripheries of this movement. For instance on July 3, 1967 District Ranger Strange reported that there had been a “Love-In” or “Be-In” “held in the dune area [outside Provincetown] recently. He said while there were a lot of unusual looking people, there were no problems.”²²² The same welcoming attitude, so strongly associated with Provincetown, continued to influence the perception and use of the back shore through the 1970s and 1980s, when Rupert Holmes mentioned it in his hit song “Escape.”²²³ Still more recently in 2001 the town created a nudist shorefront in the middle of the Peaked Hill Bars area, measuring 100 feet by 50 feet and locally known as the Spaghetti Strip.²²⁴ It soon became a topic of some debate since nearby dune dwellers objected to the presence of visiting naturists.²²⁵ Shortly thereafter, promotion of the nudist shorefront ceased.

DUNE SHACK VANDALISM, LOSS, AND PROTECTION

Increased public use of the back shore caused several dune shacks to become targets for break-ins and vandalism, starting in the 1960s. In 1963 Frank Henderson described how he kept the Jones shack secure from “a couple of intruders, who boldly told me they had purchased the place from a friend in N.Y. Blarsted liers [sic.], and ‘pimps’ of deception!”²²⁶ Similarly, one summer morning in 1966 Charlie Schmid found that someone had broken through a window into the Jones shack. Nothing appeared to have been stolen.²²⁷ Another group of three kids were caught trying to break into the Jones shack in the late summer of 1967. Though they broke off the lock on the front door they did not steal anything. Around the same time these three boys also attempted to break into the Armstrong shack.²²⁸ In a letter written in 1969, Tony Vevers, who assumed ownership of the Pfeiffer shack in Truro, describes vandalism to be such a perpetual problem that his family removed all of their belongings, including kitchen utensils, before boarding up the shack at the end of the summer. Yet, this apparent abandonment of the structure led the park service to classify the structure as unoccupied and demolish it in the winter of 1966 to 67.²²⁹ Other family members claim the shack was not abandoned and was destroyed by the park service with their belongings inside.²³⁰

Indicative of efforts to protect the dunes and heighten security along the back shore, mounted National Park Service Rangers or “mounties” began patrolling the



Figure 1.93. Drifting Sands Dune Tours visiting the dunes of the back shore in 1979 (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

area in the late 1960s, to reach the more remote locations inaccessible to dune buggies. The first horse utilized for this purpose, named Domino, was “used extensively to find lost children, [chase] beatnik characters from parked cars and generally lend assistance in remote regions.”²³¹ Year-round dune resident Charlie Schmid meanwhile offered his maintenance and surveillance services throughout the 1960s to interested shack users. In

their absence during the winter season he visited the shacks at least once a week for a fee, checking in on things and making any necessary repairs to keep the structures secure. Some of the buildings cared for by Schmid over the years were the Braaten, Wells, Watson, and Jones shacks.²³² Schmid was also known for his affinity for birds and his large collection of bird houses. Other dwellers adopted bird houses as well, and many can still be found in the vicinity of extant shacks.²³³

Meanwhile, in the 1980s all but one of the Cape Cod National Seashore lands cases had been settled. Reservations of use and occupancy had been signed, thus establishing minimal guidelines for managing the structures and the landscape.²³⁴ Each land acquisition case was different; some were straightforward, while others involved serious debates and lengthy court battles. In 1991 the last case, that of the Bessay property, was settled. Determined to preserve her rights to the Fearing/Fuller/Bessay shack, Bessay undertook what is said to be the longest lawsuit ever

brought against the United States government in the history of American law.²³⁵

Local support for the preservation of the shacks as a group did not gather strength until the mid-1980s. Dune shack caretaker Charlie Schmid died in 1982 and in 1984 the National Park



Figure 1.94. Arts Dune Tours in the dunes, circa 1970 (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

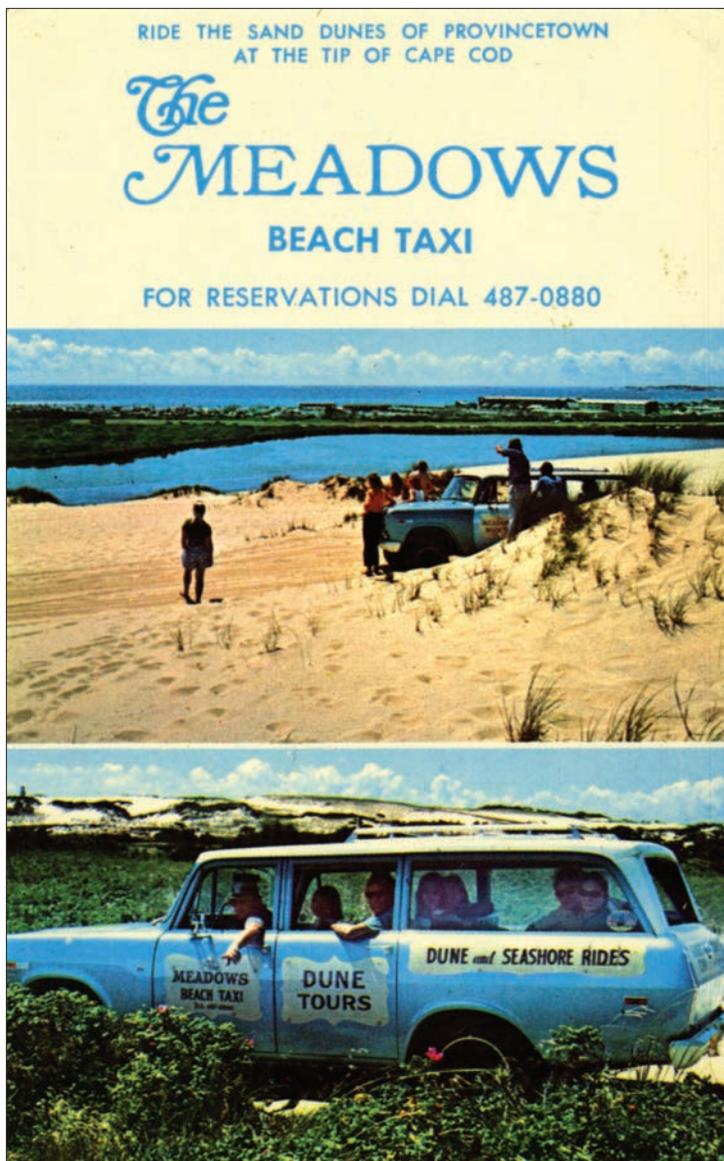


Figure 1.95. Postcard showing the Meadows Beach Taxi visiting the dunes of the back shore, in the 1960s or 70s (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

Service demolished his shack. This action was the catalyst needed to unite shack users behind a common cause. A letter in 1985 to the Massachusetts Historical Commission from Barbara Meade, Chairman of the Truro Historical Commission states their intention to protect the remaining dune shacks from destruction. The same year, the Peaked Hill Trust was founded with the express purpose of protecting the remaining shacks of the Peaked Hill Bars. The Trust was composed of a core twelve member board and soon managed the use of the two Werner shacks, as well as assistance with several others.²³⁶

The earliest efforts of the Peaked Hill Trust were the first concrete step in the protection of the dune shacks. In May 1989, despite an argument by the National Park Service against it, the majority of the park-owned structures were determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, having qualified under Criteria A, B, and C in the areas of art, architecture, and for the literary association with poet Harry Kemp.²³⁷ The involvement of dune shack users in this process played a fundamental role in convincing the park and others that the structures should be preserved, and in

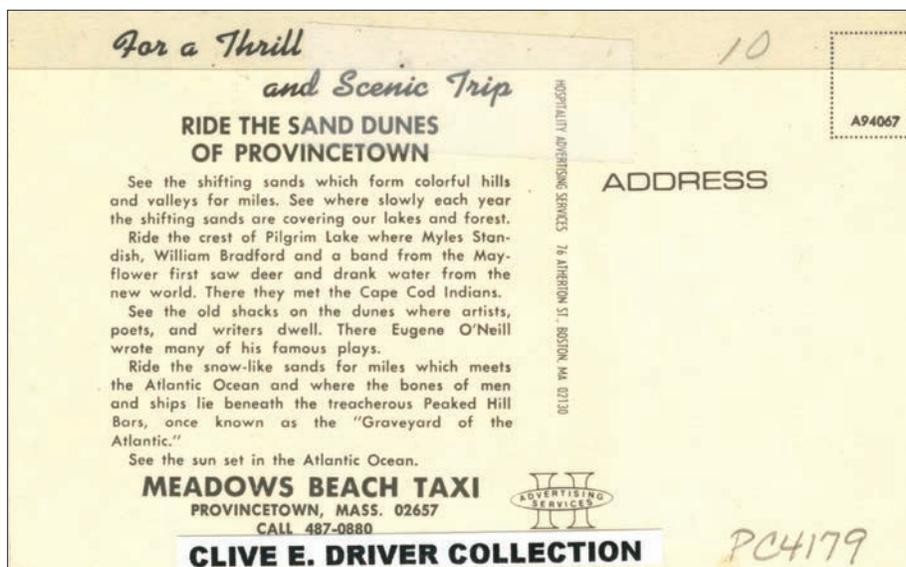


Figure 1.96. Reverse side of the promotional postcard for the Meadows Beach Taxi service in the 1960s or 70s (Pilgrim Monument Archives).



Figure 1.97. Postcard of artist painting on the back shore in the 1960s or 70s (Pilgrim Monument Archives).

their eventual recognition as historically significant buildings. The same individuals were also strong advocates for the dune landscape, which continued to be a topic of interest.

Several months after the National Register determination of eligibility, the Malkin/Ofsevit shack was lost by an accidental fire and burned to the ground in April 1990. The following year, the Peaked Hill Trust rebuilt the

Malkin/Ofsevit shack using photographs of the 1930s structure before it was modified in the 1960s and 70s. The rebuilding of the shack was a community effort, reflecting the vital role of local organizations in the ongoing management of the shacks. Drawing 3 represents the dune shack area as it appeared in 1991 after the rebuilding of the Malkin/Ofsevit shack.

Over the course of the twentieth century the dune landscape changed to reflect human intentions and use, a process which eventually brought its condition as well as that of the dune shacks to assume new importance. Although the tourists who flocked to the area throughout this period had a much different vision for use than earlier settlers and surfmen, the wear caused by their cars and feet attacked the dunes in the same way that European axes had the local woodlands.²³⁸

The landscape continued to draw tourists and artists, while the sandy shifting landscape remained vulnerable to dramatic change (Figure 1.97). Preservation had not yet caught up to the rising levels of use. In these years the ongoing formation of the curved parabolic dunes that characterized the back shore was for the first time interrupted by human admiration, prompting extensive planting efforts later launched by the National Park Service. In the final decades of the century scattered patches of beach grass once again marked these mountains of sand, along with stretches of sand fencing.

Cultural Landscape Report
 Dune Shacks of Peaked
 Hill Bars Historic District
 Cape Cod National Seashore
 Barnstable County, MA

Period Plan 1991



National Park Service
 Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation
 www.nps.gov/olcp

SOURCES

1. NPS GIS data
2. Aerial photographs, 1991

DRAWN BY

Laura Roberts, ArcMap 9.3, Adobe Illustrator CS3, 2011

LEGEND

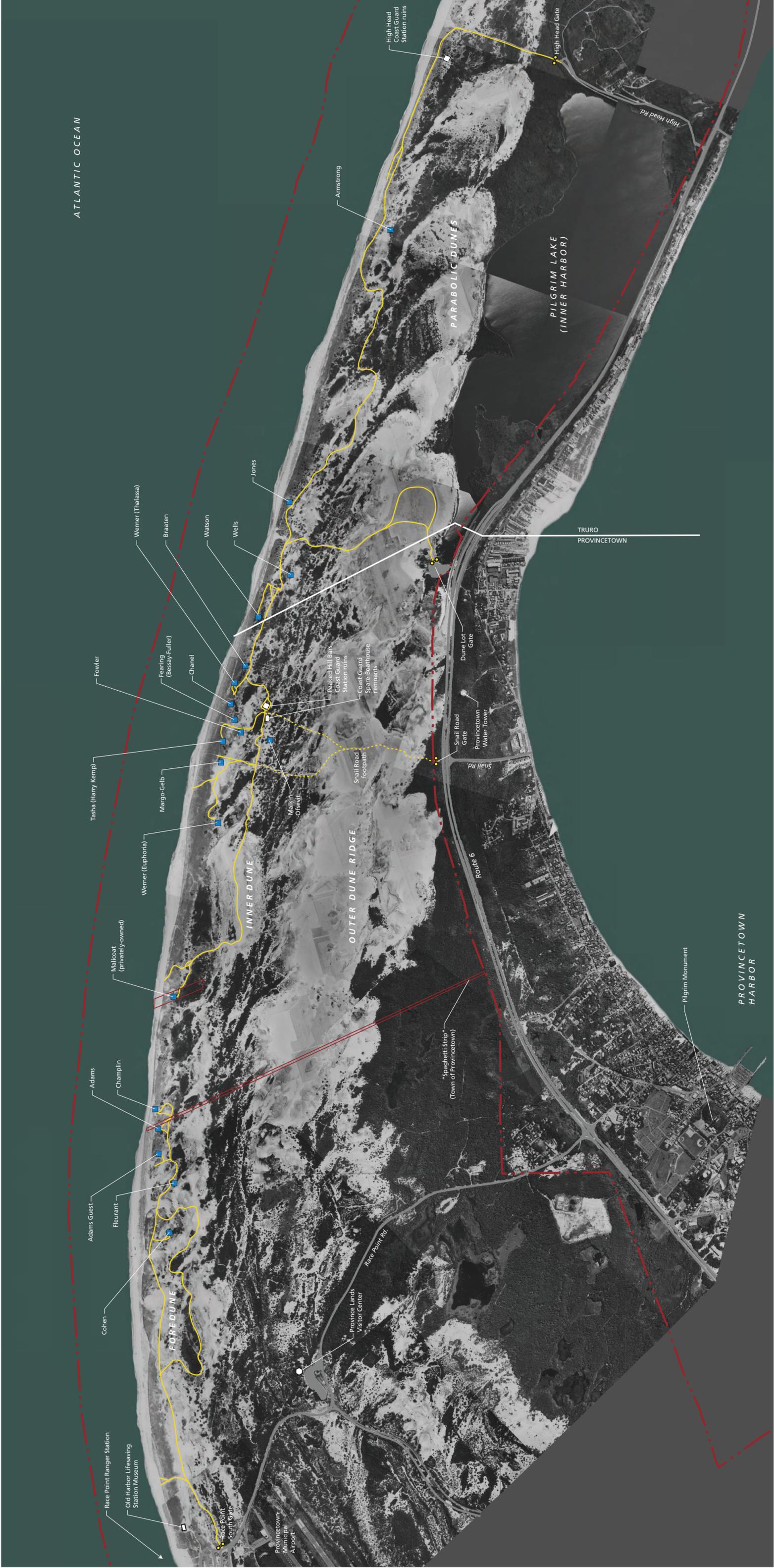
- Cape Cod NS legislative boundary
- Dune route
- Dune shack location
- Park gate
- Ruins or remnants
- Non-NPS parcel within legislative boundary

NOTES

1. All features are shown at approximate scale and location.



Drawing #3



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE MANAGEMENT, 1991 TO PRESENT

COLLABORATION IN DUNE SHACK STEWARDSHIP

Following the reconstruction of the Malkin/Ofsevit shack in 1991, the park and dune dwellers sought better guidelines for the management of the shacks. The park prepared a general management plan in 1998, which provided an overall management philosophy for the dune area. The park also supported the roles of additional local organizations formed in the early 1990s. The Provincetown Community Compact (PCC) was founded in 1993 by Jay Critchley, with the mission to “advance the cultural well-being of Provincetown, its people, and the natural environment of the Lower Cape, and to act as a catalyst for collaborative projects.”²³⁹ The Compact assumed management of the Cohen shack in the 1990s and began managing the Fowler shack in 2007, after the death of Laura Fowler in 2006. A third organization with a similar purpose was the Outer Cape Artist in Residency Consortium (OCARC), which was founded in 1995 and recognized the enduring artistic value of the dunes by establishing a formal artist-in-residence program in the dune shacks of Cape Cod National Seashore. After the death of Boris Margo in 1995, the Consortium formed an agreement with the National Park Service specifically to manage the use of the Margo/Gelb shack. It consists of four local non-profit organizations including the Provincetown Art Association and Museum, the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill, and the Peaked Hill Trust, which is its managing body.²⁴⁰

CONTINUING CHANGE IN THE DUNE LANDSCAPE

At the close of the twentieth century, literary and visual artists continued to describe and paint the beauty of the landforms, vegetation, and wildlife of the back shore. In 1999 Cynthia Huntington described an area filled with greenery running along the path followed by Art’s Dune Tours, parallel to the shore and behind the outermost line of dunes. Her words gracefully depict the scraggly vegetation typical of the dune landscape:

Woody shrubs of bayberry, rose, and beach plum form little thickets on the lee slope, and along the marsh floor meadowsweet, steepletop, and sheep laurel rise to audacious heights of two or three feet, launching themselves into space. To my right, along the slope of the second dune, bearberry spreads an ever-green carpet across the sand. Lichens and poverty grass form little mounds, and the warm dusty scent of the pitch pines lifts up out of the valley.²⁴¹

Observing the scraggly yet steady plant and wildlife of the back shore continued to be an important component in gaining a knowledge of nature in this environment, which upon first inspection felt so windswept and devoid of life. Among dune dwellers the joys of discovery were seemingly endless, just as they had been for Henry David Thoreau in 1849 and Henry Beston in the 1920s.

On average, the shoreline of the back shore outside Truro and Provincetown has grown over the last century, meaning that some structures built close to the ocean now sit further inland. Most dune shacks are located between belts, or lines, of sand dunes, where dune dwellers fend off the danger of a sand burial in exchange for protection from the relentless wind. As a result, it is difficult to see more than three or four shacks in any view looking up or down the coast, and these are frequently visible only as roof gables poking over the distant hills of sand. Some of the highest points in the dunes, such as the Peaked Hill, have meanwhile disappeared and subsequently altered lower bog areas in their surroundings with greater sand movement and even burial. Thus, the struggle between sand and life on the dunes continues.

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