

PROVINCETOWN ADVOCATE

JULY 29, 1909

ARTIST AMBROSE WEBSTER HAS PURCHASED THE STORE BUILDING AND A PORTION OF THE LAND ADJOINING AT THE SHORE OF THE BURCH ESTATE, EAST END. IT IS TO BE USED AS A STUDIO BY HIMSELF AND CLASS OF PUPILS.

Artist Andrews Webster has purchased the store building and a portion of the land adjoining at the shore of the Burch estate, east end. It is to be used as a studio by himself and

Provincetown - July 29, 1909

The studio building which is to be erected for Artist Webster at the shore, Bangs street neighborhood, is to be forty-four feet long, seventeen feet wide and two stories high, with the studio at the street end, upper floor, and student's rooms in other parts of the building.

Provincetown - March 31, 1910

“E. AMBROSE WEBSTER will again conduct his Summer School of Painting in quaint and picturesque Provincetown, at the tip end of Cape Cod, where as usual he will specialize on colour and sunlight effects, as applied especially to landscape, still life and portrait work, painting, in the latter case, from the living model in the open air. A studio is provided for the use of the class on rainy days. Three criticisms are given each week by Mr. Webster, two of them out of doors. There will also be lectures on colour. The unique location of Provincetown, added to the remoteness of the date of its settlement, provide unusual opportunities which are the delight of artists and art students.”

IN THE WORLD OF ART (undated clipping from the Monument Museum Archives)

[RE: Provincetown Art Association 3rd annual exhibition (1917) at Town Hall, jury included Hawthorne, Webster, Browne, Halsall, Sensenay, Ferguson and Mars]

"SNOW" Mr. Webster's one contribution is of a sort to justify the advertisement of his school in the catalogue: "Learn to paint sunlight and see color." The yellow houses and white snow, the foreground trees, tan in the sun and deep violet in the half-tone, are all fabricated in the familiar fearless Websterian fashion. You must hand it to this painter for making a brave display, even though there are valuable qualities which fail to appear in such a production as this.

Transcribed by Stephen Borkowski
September 2, 2001

Provincetown Torn by Strife Of Art Schools

Academicians and Modernists Make 3-Mile Exhibit on Main Street and War Draws in Villagers

Harry Kemp on the Scene

Sends Vivid Eyewitness Account of Battle of Colors and Interpretation

By HARRY KEMP

PROVINCETOWN, Mass., Aug. 6.—Provincetown, the birthplace of 'Gene O'Neill's genius, and of the original Provincetown Players, the habitat of a dozen art schools, this quaint Cape Cod town is seething with war, the result of which, at the present moment, is yet to be determined.

The colorful little fisher village of Provincetown is at war: Provincetown, at the very end and wave-wreathed snout of Cape Cod, battered at on three sides by the whole Atlantic Ocean, and pushed down to the very water's fringe by multitudinous, huge, tawny, camel-backed dunes—where fish nets are so plentiful that they are strung up for fences, and built around wooden frameworks to serve for chicken coops—this whole community is at war.

Frank Shay Gave Inspiration
It all began with a brilliant idea of Frank Shay's, anthologist and director of the "Barnstormers."

"In Paris they have their outdoor exhibits of paintings, on the Boulevard Raspail, scarcely extending a block, and, on certain occasions, the top of Montmartre is spotted with bits of gorgeous canvas.

"But let us be true Americans and go Europe one better; show 'em something—go Europe and all the rest of the world one better!"

"Which is to do?" broke in Auerbach Levy.

"To line up a whole community," took up Shay again—"line up a whole community on the side of art. There's too much privacy about artists and their work; they keep too much to themselves, then they blame the public at large for not caring."

We were standing in front of the postoffice waiting for the distribution of the noon mail. It was on the eve of the town's celebration of its anniversary. Already the streets were brilliant with haunting flags and wind-rippled gay bunting.

"To line up a whole community—but how?" put in a bystander.

"There are approximately 100 painters of pictures in this town. Look down along the beaches; you'll see groups of students painting away from outdoor models.

Miles of "Show Windows"

"There are also three miles of exhibition frontage on our main street, three miles of store windows, and windows of private houses, going to utter waste—as far as art is concerned.

"We could have a three-mile-long exhibit of art—extending the whole length of the town—the merchants"

"Do you think they would take to the idea?" asked Niles Spencer, who had just strolled up.

"I most certainly do," put in Charles Hawthorne, "if we'd only give them the chance—bring the suggestion to them."

arl nath joined the informal conference and thought it a good idea.

"Why," I observed, "here we have the two schools of art—both agreed! It certainly ought to go over.

"Auerbach Levy and Charles Hawthorne, academicians; Spencer and nath, most modern of the moderns."

"But as I cast my mind back on that now historic foregathering, I remember now, by the glint in the eyes of Hawthorne and Spencer, fronting each other, that their agreement was but the handshake of two prizefighters in the center of the ring before hostilities begin.

Merchants' Voice Doubts

The merchants along the main street were flattered, though a few were dubious:

"Do you think it will be good for my business?" asked one, who, when assured it would, on receiving his quota of paintings kept his window-lights darning all night, "so 's even the fishermen on the way to their boats before dawn could get a good look."

Soon even the dubious were brought to see the thing.

Commercial Street, frankly formerly rather dull and conventional-looking in keeping with its name, now suddenly blossomed forth as with 1,000 flowers: every window grew glorious with unwonted art; pictures beckoned and flamed to the eye; still life and nudes (that a few objected to); boats and nets depicted; sedate portraits; they jostled canned goods, hardware, all the merchandise needed of man, pushing them back into indignant, secondary place.

The town grew all agog over the art

that had thriven, unbeknown, in its midst, these many years.

Before every window hung bee-like knots of fresh-blown critics—taciturn New Englanders were stirred into volubility who seldom gave a thought before but to, crisp, hard-worded trade and barter; Portuguese fishermen, whose sole idea hitherto had been whether or not there would be a good run of mackerel, and the varying prices of the catch.

Now they all milled about in little groups, excitedly discussing the merits and demerits of this three-mile frontage that was for the first time given over to what painters put down on canvas with the chastely or wantonly welded brush.

Local Color, Local Critics

"That sh there ain't quite right; never seen a ma'krel like that before; don't look at all like that when I heap 'em up in the boat from the nets."

"What I want to know is where that feller ever saw a cow that color!"

But another's work was praised as being, in every respect faithful to the nature and character of the subject.

The works of most received hearty layman praise, almost gratitude, from the mouth and heart, for being hung where they could be seen of all.

I shall swing my muse into the historical present, on this, the far-flung dawn of Provincetown's first day of celebration.

A rumble of battle grows ominous in the air.

Academician and Modernist—they are rapidly and mutteringly swinging deploying into two opposing camps, with glint of palette instead of gun-muzzle; with shine of angry paint instead of forth-drawn sword.

Palette knives are already in evidence—here and there a clenched fist is raised—and a folded easel, make no mistake, heftily swung by brawny arms is, when welded expert, a most lethal weapon.

On the side of the Conservatives, Charles Hawthorne calls the roll. He finds unflinching partisanship in Auerbach Levy, Richard Miller, Woelfie, Benker, Desch, Ferguson, Webster and a most of others, including students who answer the clarion from all states of the Union:

Niles Spencer anxiously but confidently looks along the ranks of the Moderns, Moffett, Kaeslow, Howland, Lindenmuth, Knath, and a host of others, including a few students who have seceded from the ranks of their conservative leaders.

The town itself breaks in an almost strict line of cleavage distinctly racial.

Foreigners Join Modernists

The staid New-England citizen, with his front-yard garden still full of quaint old-fashioned flowers such as heart's ease and the bachelor button; with the figure-head of the whaling ship his grandfather sailed to far and barbarous seas now stuck over his door—post as a remembrance—invariably stands by the academician.

The Portuguese fisherman ranks with the modernist, perhaps because he sees in the helter-skelter spiles, underneath, that sustain the rambling, rowdy wharves, in the jumbled heap of ragging, gasping colors of fish heaping iridescent from tumultuous nets, the truth of the modernist ideal.

From the West End of Town—"from up-along" as the natives say—comes the glorying, sweet sound of advancing, belligerent guitars, grimly strung and tasselled with ribbons; The Portuguese and the moderns advance singing songs of romance, battlesongs from Lisbon and "The Islands."

Colorful words of Latin derivation sing high, replete with the orderly exuberance of indiscipline that can fight right handily when put to it.

Conservatives Advance to Fray

Orderly advance from The East—from "down-along," the more carefully ranged battalions under Hawthorne and Corporal Levy.

A boatswain's whistle is heard; the cry of a clear bugle rises like the challenging crow of a cock.

Conflict first is seriously joined by The Town Movie House. A bloody battle is fought before Adams's Drug Store. The huge plate glass window is in imminent danger of contributing an immense crystal shower of sudden, impartial glass on the combatants, who recognize their danger, to the relief of Mr. Adams, and veer over toward the post office.

The two fronts are now clashing before Patrick's News Store. There goes his popcorn stand with a splurge of white.

Up and down the entire main street the combat seethes—pigment files like belligerent dawns striking against russet fringes of night.

Was that a sunset exploding—or a pot of many paints flung by Lindemuth at the head of Webster?

Relief!

Here come the seventeen state police, together with the four town officers and several hastily sworn deputies. The seventeen state police wear spick and span uniforms, rather natty ones, that I am afraid are about to assume the color of Joseph's coat, in the flying paint.

Ship's Guns Cover Town

Out in the sun-glorious bay exploding into glints of sunlight, out there rides the battleship Arkansas. I detect a glint of guns. Will they soon speak or not?

Will these men of war—and order—preserve order, or will they, in common with the townsmen, scenting the spilled paint, leap to the fray as at the smell of blood? Will they too take sides?

Provincetown Fete Aug. 4-7 Observes Founding in 1727

Community to Make 200th
Anniversary of Incorporation;
Tourists to Flock
Where Pilgrims Landed

Special to the Herald Tribune

PROVINCETOWN, Mass., July 23.—Seven years ago Provincetown had its celebration of the 300th anniversary of the Landing of the Pilgrims on the first soil touched by their feet on the American continent. Now it will celebrate its 200th anniversary of the incorporation of the town, though its history goes back much farther.

August 4-7 is the time set for the celebration and each day will be filled with such important matters as to attract the ordinary tourists and summer visitors as well as the historians and antiquarians.

Provincetown is a little community of rare delights for the casual visitor, but when it is in gala form all of its beauties are a thousand fold enhanced. Here you will find tablets and towers and monuments testifying to the fact that in Provincetown the first white child of New England was born, while the Pilgrims tarried here; that in its soil lie buried the first dead of the Pilgrim fathers; that "on this spot" the Pilgrims landed and in yonder harbor they signed the sacred compact in the cabin of the Mayflower.

All these things will be remembered in the coming celebration. The visitor will not need to have pointed out the Pilgrim Monument, which towers 345 feet above the level of the sea. It dominates everything and is the pride and glory of this quaint, old town. The harbor with its wharves and piers, its many fishing vessels and its yellow sands will attract the eye and rest the mind, while its narrow streets and Old World alleys will lure many feet to explore their artistic secrets.

Then, too, Provincetown is an artistic center of many kinds. Painters, musicians and authors are found here in large numbers. You will see Charles W. Hawthorne's Cape Cod School of Art painting on the beach, or A. E. Webster's students doing futurist or modernistic paintings. You may ask to see the home of Mary Heaton Vorse, the author, or Eugene O'Neil's place where he does his dramas and tragedies. If you pass along the wharves you will come to the home of the Wharf Players, who are the immediate successors of the Provincetown Players, so well known to New York audiences. Here under the presidency of Mrs. Mary Bicknell and the directorship of Louis Leon Hall a group of young actors and dramatists, including William Faversham jr., are presenting plays each week that are remarkable in setting, cast and acting.

PROVINCETOWN LINES STREET FOR BIGGEST PARADE IN 200 YEARS

Thirty Floats Decorated by Artists
—Reviewed by Senator
Walsh

Provincetown, Aug. 5—This Cape tip town, which yesterday opened a four-day celebration of the 200th anniversary of its incorporation, today lined the main street for the biggest parade in its history. More than thirty floats, decorated by famous artists, were ready to start at two o'clock. The Navy, the Coast Guard, the artists and the natives all were represented, and Senator David I. Walsh, Congressman Charles L. Gifford and Speaker John C. Hull of the State House of Representatives, reviewed the line. Later these and Nancy Paine Smith, historian of Provincetown, were to speak at exercises in Town Hall.

The two thousand visitors to the town, comprising all the faithful of the summer habitues of the town, past, present and possibly future, were augmented by a large boatload from Boston. These other guests of the town were enabled to see the parade by a delay in the return sailing of the Dorothy Bradford until the long procession had passed.

Tonight the Pilgrim Monument will again be lighted by electric lights in the form of the dates 1620, 1727 and 1927. The narrow streets of the town are bountifully decorated, and the still narrower sidewalks are crowded. The artists have collected a display even more extensive than usual, and tea-rooms and restaurants are doing a land office business.

The U. S. S. Arkansas is anchored in the harbor. Beams from its searchlight play on the town after dark, its band has given a number of concerts, and its ball team defeated the local team 16 to 7 in an exciting game. Landing boats every hour carry scores of visitors out to the vessel.

The Highland Coast Guard again gave a demonstration to a couple of thousand on the working of the breeches buoy. E. B. Andrew, officer in charge of the station, made a perfect shot of 90 yards to "rescue" A. R. Silva, surfman of the station.

Last evening members of the first year high school class reviewed the history of the town. Blonde Katherine Viera opened the Memory Book and introduced her classmates, who built up, bit by bit, the story of the settlement from the landing of Thorwald, brother of Lief Erickson, through the coming of the Pilgrims down to the present day.

*BALT Paper Collection
HERITAGE MUSEUM*

New England Honors Rebel at Art Club

Late Ambrose Webster Was a Pioneer in Full Color at Provincetown

By William Germain Dooley

ONE of the mildest of American artistic rebels was the late E. Ambrose Webster. His death last January at the age of sixty-six removed one of the guiding spirits of the Impressionistic and Illuministic movement in this country. Almost alone he fought the battle of what was then called "modernism" in the Provincetown art colony, and under his lead there, a group of artists, mostly New Yorkers, who were summer residents, began the July "modern" exhibitions at the Art Association. This past summer that annual show was, in a sense, dedicated to his work. Now the Boston Art Club has set forth, as its opening event, a chronologically arranged exhibit of his work from 1906 to his latest canvases.

His career was in some respects an unusual one. Blessed with the ordinary advantages of an American youth of his time who aspired to an artistic career, and enjoying the training of the best teachers of the traditional school here and abroad, it is to his credit that he gradually broke away from what is considered now a hampering tradition and developed his work along courageous lines of full color in high intensity. That he did not achieve distinction in his personal effort is beside the matter, compared with the actual rugged individualism which had to be shown in pre-war exhibitions.

Talented Student in Paris

E. Ambrose Webster was born in Chelsea, Massachusetts, in 1869. He was a student at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School under Benson and Tarbell, and later went to Paris, where—as all aspiring American students should—he studied at Laurens, Benjamin-Constant, and Albert Gleizes. Local tradition hereabouts also has it that he was a star pupil at Julian's, his draughtsmanship being facile and strong. It is remembered by his fellow pupils that his drawings were hung on the walls of the academy as exemplary specimens of that type of work.

Whatever his promise was at that time, one cannot find virtuosity of drawing in his memorial exhibit at the Art Club. There are over forty pictures covering a span of twenty-five years' work, and showing Webster's growth from an academy trained student to a painter in brilliant colors, working from the dazzling effects of objects in full sunlight to a more or less tentative

Only immediate local development in the week's news of greatly enlarged funds for the government artists' project for the coming year, is the prospect of taking about fifty more artists from the P.W.A.P. application lists for work on Federal buildings which have not received appropriations for murals or other art work. As yet no details of the new largesse have filtered through to neglected New England.

attempt at abstraction and cubistic rationalization of his design. They do show, to an observant and long-memoried visitor, somewhat of the "open air" approach in glowing and vivid colors which caused so much comment in his earliest exhibits in Boston, at the Art Club (of which he was a member) and elsewhere.

His Influence Is His Memorial

It is difficult to imagine, nowadays, that such entirely uneventful passages of painting: "en plein air" could have caused so much furor. Certain it is that the blurring of outlines in dazzling light, the crude raw pigmentation that was sought in blazing tropic scenes, the early canvases that were lacking in subtlety of technique, the otherwise pleasantly clear and clean handling would not excite more than an historical observation nowadays. Like so many of the brilliant youths of his artistic generation, Webster was more a conduit of the new light than a generative force of originality. His illuminism was a transplanted form, a reaction to the new glories of the late nineteenth century Paris Illuminists that was enthusiastic but hardly with discriminatory foundation for the sound structural features.

How he overcame this tendency for a period is best shown in those canvases which are dated in the years 1917-1920, with solid landscapes and semi-tropic views enlightened by a full flood of intense color. Here one sees his "Red House," "St. George's," or the only half-realized prophecies of his northern landscape "Snow," painted in 1919. The impressionism of such treatises as "Rocks" in 1916 has changed to a more consistent handling in the following years. How he came to embrace the later, and more advanced modes of painting, through various phases into abstractionism, may be seen to have only an aftergrowth of spontaneity. One or two of them stand out with a well organized design of figure and plain backgrounds, but the rest descend into well lighted but otherwise disjointed decorative screens. In the last analysis, the memorial to Ambrose

The Fine Arts



La Gaude, France, by E. Ambrose Webster

Included in the Memorial Exhibit of the Late Provincetown Painter's Work, Now on View at the Boston Art Club. Painted in 1927

Webster will not be his own work, but the profound influence and encouragement which he gave to a younger generation at Provincetown, at a time when few of the worthy elders would support their initiative. The exhibition at the Art Club will continue through Sept. 28.

[Right Illustration]

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ARTISTS PREFER 'EM PLUMP NOW

DiETING Likely to Go Out of Fashion As "Curves" Again Become Fashionable

PROVINCETOWN, Aug. 16—Artists prefer "plumps"—be they blondes or brunettes.

This advance word from the front that makes dieting as old-fashioned as a petticoat comes from Paris by the way of E. Ambrose Webster, noted artist, whose summer school has attracted hundreds of students to the quaint town in the past 20 years or so.

Straight, shapeless slimness is going out of fashion when it comes to feminine form. Artists won't paint thin girls. A bunch of students over in gay Patee went on a strike last winter, and the reason, according to Mr. Webster, was that the model boasted of a boyish form. Yes, sir, the art students demanded that a plump maiden with pleasing curves be offered up on the altar of art.

PREFER TO PAINT "PLUMPS"

"Gentlemen may prefer blondes, but the artists want to paint plumps," Mr. Webster told a Post reporter who interviewed him in his cottage up on the hill, overlooking the harbor. And the pictures in the living room in which the interview took place, all done by the artist-teacher, illustrated this startling fact—the women in the paintings were all large and well built.

Now, of course, all plump women can't become artists' models, but Mr. Webster disclosed further good news that will send calorific dieting up like a kite—and as useless as a paper one in a thunderstorm.

"CURVES" NOW POPULAR

"And when artists agree on a certain type, that type usually becomes the popular one," Mr. Webster announced. "Paris has grown tired of the slim Egyptian type of beauty, the lineless, shapeless form. They have decided they want to paint curves, to see curves; a feminine, womanly figure—not a replica of a young boy.

"Picasso, the leading artist in Paris, came out last winter for the model with a rounded figure. And that means a lot, for Picasso is a leader there," the artist explained.

"The new feminine type must have solidity, bulkiness. We are interested in painting the third dimension," Mr. Webster declared, leaving the interviewer to fathom out the third dimension, whatever that may be. "Blondes are apt to be preferred by artists, too, but not because they are blondes. Their coloring doesn't really count, but we have discovered that the blonde is more apt to be bulky."

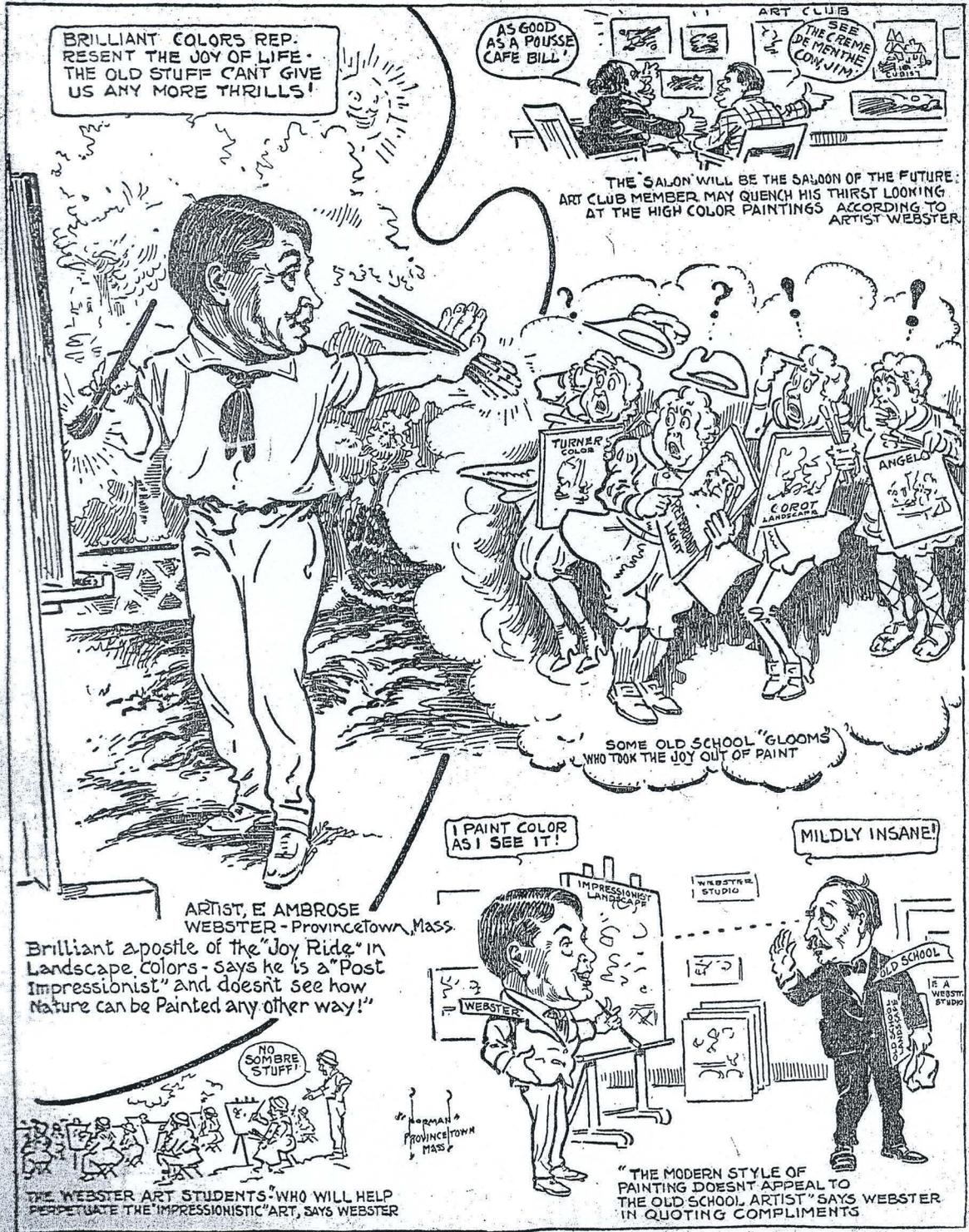
TOO MUCH DIETING, HE SAYS

American women have dieted altogether too much in the last few years, according to Mr. Webster. And the painter is an authority on the feminine pulchritude on both sides of the ocean, for he summers here and winters at Nice, where he has a studio. Mr. Webster is very well known in Boston, having had many exhibits at the Boston Art Club.

"Americans, that is, the average American man one meets on the streets today, has little appreciation of art," declared the painter. "His eye can appreciate only the dollar sign engraved on a greenback. But this country has evolved a new type of architecture that is truly beautiful—that is, the New York skyscrapers."

ART OF OLD SCHOOL MUCH TOO SOMBRE SAYS 'MODERN' ARTIST

E. Ambrose Webster Explains Use of Brilliant Colors
—Public Wants Brilliancy Declares Provincetown Art Ass'n Vice-President





PROVINCETOWN ART ASSOCIATION & MUSEUM

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E. AMBROSE WEBSTER

Early Modernist Painter

A Panel Discussion

moderated by: James Bakker

with panelists: Stephen Borkowski

Julie Heller, Miriam Stubbs

and Tony Vevers

Saturday, September 8, 2001

at 8 PM

(Please note that this is a change of date.)

FREE TO THE PUBLIC

Gain insight into the work of one of the Art Association's founding fathers, E. Ambrose Webster. Learn how Webster's work helped mold Provincetown into a center for learning, as well as his contribution to the historical significance of Provincetown as an art colony. The exhibition E. Ambrose Webster: Early Modernist Painter will remain on view through October 14, 2001.