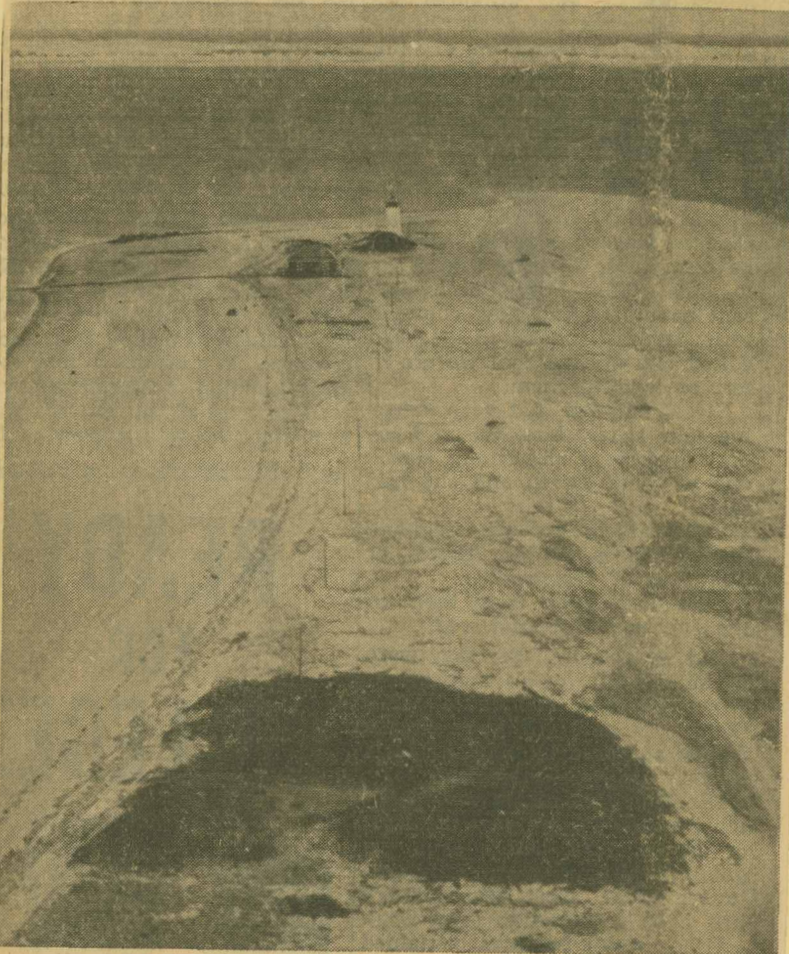


PROVINCETOWN, MASS.

Harvard Men Guarded These Ramparts



Provincetown-Boston Airline Photo

Most of our visitors, if they see it, think this formation is a dune. As a matter of fact, during the Civil War it was an important fort guarding against Confederate and English blockade runners.



Provincetown-Boston Airline Photo

Another view of the Civil War fort at the very end of Long Point is shown here.

Unnoticed by summer visitors, and all but forgotten by year round residents, but a mystery to most, is a crater-like hole, the sides of which rise from the low lying spit of land adjacent to Long Point, which is the very tip of the Cape End.

Alongshore

BY JOHN BELL
-July 25, 1963-

Out on Long Point the gulls' nesting season nears its end as young fledglings run out of the grass and take to the water. Dark gray, long-legged and tailless at this stage, they are closely guarded by their parents and still subject to attack by other adults if they stray from their own nests. Hundreds are annually killed by savage pecks on the head — my wife and I saw one baby survive two blows that sent it tumbling down one of the twin hills.

Those hills have an interesting history. In 1857, to be nearer the fishing, a sizeable part of Provincetown lay on Long Point. Some thirty dwellings, plus stores, salt works, even a schoolhouse, clustered along the shore of Lobster Plain, a tidal inlet now silted up and dry at low tide. Then came the Civil War and the threat of blockade and bombardment. Twice before, during the Revolution and again in 1812, Provincetown had been a ruined, almost deserted town, occupied by British ships that forcibly discouraged the fishing so important to its economy. Between 1813 and 1860 the town prospered; its schooners sailed by the hundreds to farm the ocean; but always its exposed shoreline was vulnerable in time of war.

This time the people prepared to defend themselves. Two imposing breastworks were thrown up to conceal and protect artillery commanding the narrowest part of the harbor entrance. According to historian Arthur Bickers, the late Jack Rosenthal's grandfather was in charge of the forts. I have yet to find records showing whether the guns were actually fired in wartime.

Later the entire Long Point colony moved back to Provincetown, floating the houses on barges "With the people living within and the smoke curling up from the chimneys." Most of the houses landed in the west end of town; the schoolhouse went to the center and became Mattheson's Department Store, later Arnold's, Inc. until it burned down in the early 1950's and was replaced by Arnold's fireproof building on the same site.

Today nothing is left of the Long Point settlement but stubs of wharf pilings in Lobster Plain, and the grass-grown hills where nothing stayed to be defended. Probably a lot of good history can be read in their names: Fort Useless and Fort Ridiculous.

1290 09