

THE IMPLICATIONS OF REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS
ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION NONPROFITS
THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF NEWPORT COUNTY
A CASE STUDY

A Thesis

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Hannah Rose Miller

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ABSTRACT

Newport, Rhode Island has a rich history dating back to Colonial times and its built environment reflects that. The Preservation Society of Newport County was created in 1946 to protect this environment. Through their preservation efforts they have become the owner and interacted with 37 properties in the county, some of which they have subsequently sold while keeping others. This thesis is a record of those transactions and an analysis on what those transactions have done for the economy of the Society and the county. It is also a look into how outside economic factors have influenced the Society's real estate decisions and that of their donors. The Preservation Society is a case study on the effects that real estate transactions have on preservation nonprofits and the cities they reside in.

Hannah Rose Miller

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hannah Miller was born in Niskayuna, New York. She attended Albany Academy for Girls, graduating in 2012. Hannah received her undergraduate degree from Goucher College in Towson, Maryland. While at Goucher, Hannah majored in History with minors in Historic Preservation and Art History. Highlights of her undergraduate program included two trips abroad one semester in Greece, and another traveling western Europe. This coupled with her course work began her appreciation for historic preservation. During her undergraduate career Hannah interned for two summers at the Saratoga Springs Preservation Foundation in Saratoga Springs, New York. In 2016 Hannah graduated from Goucher College.

After graduating she started an internship at the Schenectady County Historical Society. When the internship was over, she was hired as a Program Assistant for the Society. Her work in Schenectady was primarily at the Mabee Farm Historic Site. After over a year at the Schenectady County Historical Society she enrolled in the Cornell University Historic Preservation Planning Master's Program, from which she will graduate in August 2019.

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INTRODUCTION

The opulent mansions in Newport, Rhode Island are representative of the lavish consumption of the Gilded Age. The most famous of these, the Breakers and Marble House, were built by the infamous Vanderbilts to show their wealth to the world. The preservation of these buildings has led to impressive heritage tourism for Newport, but before they were preserved many of the landmarks were almost lost.

The Preservation Society of Newport County was founded in 1946, in the city of Newport, Rhode Island, with the expressed purpose of saving the county's historic Colonial buildings. Through the Society's more than seventy years of activity, they have grown and changed their mission from a focus on Colonial buildings to protecting the city's Gilded Age treasures. This journey was guided by both historic and economic criteria. Throughout their history they have been the steward of many properties within the county. Some of these the Society kept, some they sold at a profit, and some were protected and then essentially given away. This thesis tracks 37 of those properties, a complete list of all of their properties in Newport county that the Society has interacted with, and one just outside of the county. These buildings have both helped their finances and supported the growth of the Society and hurt their bottom line causing them more trouble rather than providing assistance.

This thesis is a record of these real estate transactions and an analysis of what they meant for both the Society and the city. This is a look at the economics behind the decisions the Preservation Society has made in regard to their real estate selections. The economy of the town, as well as that of the Society, will be discussed within this research. The focus is on understanding both the impact that the buildings had on the Society, as well as the reasoning the Society provided to acquire them, and what that means for the bigger picture of the organization's mission and purpose. Deaccessioning historic buildings is a difficult decision for an institution whose purpose is preservation, as they should ensure that the properties are still preserved. This thesis examines the motives of this Society to sell some of their historic properties and the decisions to maintain historic buildings.

Economics of the Society and the city intertwine to create the story presented in this thesis. The Preservation Society of Newport County has changed the landscape of the city along with the other preservation oriented groups in Newport. The purchase and sales of these properties had an impact that went beyond the Society and helped to shape the organization of the town and instill its legacy. The Society's contribution today is primarily known by the houses which they still own. This thesis will show that they have had a much longer impact on the town and a large role in its economic stability. This is also an example to other Preservation nonprofits on how they can promote preservation and expand their fundraising reach by using historic properties as an economic tool with which they can make money, preserve history, help the environment, and interact with the community in a positive way. Some of the buildings that the Society interacted with were donated with the purpose to be sold, so the Society could both protect the buildings and make money for their organization. Under the right circumstances another nonprofit could use this history to support their organization and community financially while still striving towards their ultimate mission of preservation.

This thesis does not look at the construction of the buildings nor the conditions they were in when they were donated. The document primarily does not comment on the work that was completed, or was needed, to restore or repair them either for resale or for presentation to the public. This is also not an exhaustive history of any of the structures mentioned nor a comprehensive look at their architectural merit, though enough of this information is included to make the reader aware of the value of the buildings and their importance in history. The intention of this thesis is not to write a history of these buildings or their wealthy owners, many of which have already been substantially studied and written about in great detail in other thesis essays, and books: some of which are cited within this text. This work delves into the historic and economic impacts of decisions that were made in purchasing and later selling Newport's historic properties.

Both primary and secondary sources were used for research in this thesis to study the economics of the Preservation Society. Secondary sources include books written about the

history of the city of Newport and some of its more famous citizens along with their country estates. Primary sources include deeds, wills, chains of title, audit reports, attendance reports, annual meeting reports, annual meeting minutes, *Newport Gazette* publications, *New York Times* articles, Trustee Board meetings, interviews with current Staff at the Preservation Society of Newport County, the original architectural survey of Newport County, and historic maps and atlases. Almost all of the primary source documents were found either in the city's collections, primarily in their deeds office, or in the Preservation Society's collection and archives.

Please note that the fiscal year for the Society is March 31 of the previous year to April 1 of the year stated. All year end dates referring to finances refer to that timeline unless otherwise noted within the chapters, this is also the timeline used for attendance per year dates. Several primary sources provided much of the information in the text, one was the Annual Meetings minutes, which were the notes taken at the fiscal year end meeting for members of the Society. The *Newport Gazettes*, which were the publications of the Society, are also used throughout this chapter. Data from the earlier magazine *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953* published by the Society about their yearly events, often referencing past Annual Meetings, is a separate resource entity. Later these publications were replaced by Annual Reports, which are more closely linked to the Annual Meetings. Annual Reports came out once a year, while the *Newport Gazette* had many printings per year. There are also many chains of title cards and deeds cited throughout this text in the footnotes, and several secondary source books noted to provide brief histories of some of the houses. In the text, especially in Chapter Four, there is research done using Board of Trustee Meeting Minuets meant to help understand the Board's position on these transactions, and to make clearer some of the sales choices which are not clear from looking solely at the deeds.

The object of this thesis is to understand the impact that the Society had on the historic fabric of the town through their transactions with and the effect that these transactions had on the Society. It is also a look at the economic effects of these transactions for the Society and the town. Because of the topic and also because of the sources used this research is primarily looking

at this topic from the perspective of the Society. Of course, their property interactions did not occur in a vacuum, but the goal of this paper is not necessarily to understand the town's perspective or local government's. This is a study of a preservation nonprofit and so the focus remains on their perspective throughout this paper, which at times may make it seem one sided, which these interactions were not, but only one side and one perspective is being researched here. The community is represented only in the other sides of the sales transactions, individuals and government may be seen trying to use the Society to their benefit both to save homes which they believe need to be saved and to accrue tax benefits.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses in brief the founding of Newport and its establishment as a Colonial town and its mercantile industry, tracing its history through its Gilded Age and the building of many of the mansions. This is the reason why the Preservation Society of Newport County was founded. The first chapter is an introduction to Newport's history. The chapter establishes many of the reasons why the community settled, starting when the European settlers arrived in Rhode Island and covering some Native American history. This chapter covers over 200 years and is not meant to be all-encompassing, but rather to give the reader the basic background knowledge necessary to understand Newport and the context for the historical buildings that the Society later acquired.

Chapter Two picks up where Chapter One ends, at the beginning of World War I and the beginning of the Preservation Society of Newport County in the 1940s through their establishment as a permanent force in the city in the 1970s. In this chapter the end of the Gilded Age is addressed, along with the economic downturn of the town during the Depression. It examines the reasons why the Preservation Society became a necessity for the city, as buildings were becoming endangered. After World War II the Preservation Society of Newport County was founded and worked to solidify their presence starting with their efforts to conserve the city's Colonial heritage. The efforts began with the emergency efforts to save the Hunter House from loss of historic integrity. By the 1970s the Preservation Society of Newport County had

established itself and Chapter Two describes how and why the Society was and still is important to the city.

Chapter Three is the inventory of all the buildings that the Society has owned throughout Newport's history, starting with their first purchase of the Hunter House in 1946 through the present day in 2019. It is also a look at the financial holdings and affairs of the organization. The comprehensive catalogue details what the Society sold, what they kept, what was donated, and what was bought. Each transaction is discussed and documented thoroughly. Every house listed is also given a brief history so that the reader may understand its historic significance, and the development threats that faced each property. The specifics are significant to help understand the Society's motivations behind becoming involved with each individual property, not to create an exhaustive history of the houses. In chronological order, this chapter addresses much of the new research that went into the thesis, using principally primary sources. Through this chapter the Society's motives and decisions begin to become clear to the reader. This list was compiled through property deeds, chains of title, annual reports, and Preservation Society of Newport County publications. Chapter Three also attempts to understand the economic impact of the transactions by looking at the Society's Audits and Annual Reports.

Chapter Four is an analysis of the buildings listed in Chapter Three using Trustee Board Meeting Minutes from the years and months that the buildings in question were discussed in order to analyze the reasoning behind the decisions to keep or sell buildings. Chapter Four also puts these transactions into the context of broader economic trends and country wide political events in an attempt to explain the mindset and reasoning behind these decisions. It also places these decisions within the broader context of national events both political and economic, including wars and presidencies, as well as within the broader context of national historic preservation trends. This chapter also includes an interview with the Society's long-time lawyer William Corcoran who has been associated with the Society in one form or another since childhood as his father was the lawyer for the Society before he became officially involved with their legal affairs in the 1950s.

Finally, the Conclusion is a discussion of the findings and results of the transactions focused on the economic impacts of the acquisition and sale of buildings and land. The conclusion suggestions future studies, commentary on the economy and land acquisition decisions of the Society today, as well as conversations from staff of the Preservation Society. There is also commentary in this section based on consultations with Trudy Coxe, the CEO and Executive Director of the Preservation Society. A discussion on the importance of institutional knowledge within the Society and future plans to address this recurring issue that appears throughout the study. An analysis is also presented on what this research could mean for other preservation organizations.

The purpose of this thesis is to understand the economic impacts of buying, accepting donations, selling property, and keeping property on a non-profit Society and the town in which they reside. The Preservation Society of Newport County was chosen for this study for many reasons. Their size and extended history are a factor, but so too is their extensive past with real estate transactions. This produces an opportunity to examine the varied challenges that come with owning diverse buildings, selling them, and opening them up to the public. The economic well being of the Preservation Society was greatly affected by each of these transactions in many different ways throughout their history, which has caused them to change their outlook on such activities many times. Both the negative and positive effects of these activities are discussed. This thesis is a story of both the property and economic history of the Preservation Society of Newport County up until 2019, as well as commentary on what that means for other institutions. Real estate questions are also examined, including whether or not any property should be accepted, or if easements and covenants should be placed on all such properties. The economic and historical insights will give a view into what the future holds for the Society and other preservation non-profits.

CHAPTER ONE: NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND A BRIEF HISTORY

Introduction

Newport, Rhode Island is known today for its ocean views, tennis hall of fame, history, and of course its famed architecture. This town's history tells many different aspects of American life throughout the lifespan of this country. Its Colonial past was rich and unique to the history of the nation. The Gilded Age has been immortalized in the mansions here (locals would say the "cottages" a term which is both ironic in this sense and telling), many of which are under the watchful eye of The Preservation Society of Newport County. The Society has a long and fascinating history that leads to the discussion of land acquisitions and the role that they have played in the fundraising and funding at the house museums that exist in Newport today, and how those interactions have effected preservation in the town as a whole. To understand how the houses were created and where they are now, it is first important to understand how and why the city originated. Newport's unique character makes this discussion important. This chapter presents a brief history of Newport, Rhode Island and how the cottages came to be from pre-colonial times to the eve of the first World War.

The Founding of Rhode Island

Rhode Island's distinctive founding set the scene for Newport's success. The unique scenario created the opportunity for wealth in ways not available in other parts of the New World. Newport's story begins with a man in Massachusetts and his exile to an "unsettled" land.

In 1636 Roger Williams was exiled from the colony of Massachusetts and sent into the wilds of what would become, many years later, the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Williams was a Puritan with ideas of reforming the Puritan church and the way that it was factored into state government. His rebellious rhetoric led the colony of Massachusetts to exile him to an area unsettled by Europeans, without resources, along with some of his followers. Specifically, one of his controversial ideas was that land was owned by ancestral right unless

sold, meaning that native peoples had to sell the land that Europeans were coming to take. He also believed that religion should not control government. A forerunner to the idea of separation between church and state, these ideas were too controversial for the Puritan inhabitants of Massachusetts. Many of these Massachusetts inhabitants had left England for religious freedom, but not the same freedoms as Williams wanted, and their ideas conflicted.¹

With his disciples Williams laid out the early city of Providence, hoping to completely separate religion from governance. His path was not easy and not without hardship, but soon others joined him. They went on to separate further creating new cities and towns in the new colony of Rhode Island.² This early separation from Massachusetts created different forms of governance in the New World and proved their viability. This expansion would eventually lead to the creation of Newport.

One of these religious dissidents, who was inspired by Williams' dissension from the norm, was Anne Hutchinson. Hutchinson had controversial views that almost went so far as to say that religion had nothing to do with morality. She believed that God's grace was enough to get the faithful into heaven and that morality was altogether a different issue. These beliefs were something that the Massachusetts government could not accept. This notion insinuated that the church was a less powerful entity and thus reduced its control on the inhabitants of the colony. Hutchinson found herself and her followers exiled as Williams had been. Unlike Williams, Hutchinson did not have to start from nothing as Williams had already established a place for her followers to go. In 1638 they established Portsmouth in Rhode Island, a city near to Providence but far enough to have its own community.³

A year after this town's establishment, nine of Anne Hutchinson's followers decided to move away from Portsmouth and founded a new area that would later come to be known as Newport. They ventured farther down the coast of Rhode Island to a largely uninhabited area. At the time no native peoples lived there on a permanent basis, which will be further explained later

¹ Edwin S. Gaustad, *Roger Williams*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 45-70.

² Gaustad, *Roger Williams*, 45-70.

³ Gaustad, *Roger Williams*, 45-70.

on in the chapter, though they did use the space.⁴ The first English settlers of Newport did, however, buy the land from the Narragansett Native Americans in a more egalitarian sense than their Massachusetts counterparts would have thought necessary.⁵ These followers included William Coddington, William Brenton, John Clarke, and the Easton family. These settlers came to this new land already wealthy. Coddington was considered the richest man in Boston before his move. They were well respected, not only in the colonies but also in their homes in England, yet chose to go out on their own path and start a new town.⁶

Geography and Commerce

Part of Newport's success had to do with its geographic location and natural environment. While its religious ideas also played a significant part in its ability to grow, so too did its physical nature. Newport is a peninsula that juts out from the southernmost part of Rhode Island into the Atlantic Ocean.⁷ The Harbor around Narraganset Bay led to the success of the city. On the south side of Newport there is the Rhode Island Sound that empties into the Atlantic Ocean. To the northeast Newport curves in on itself creating a protected area known as Narragansett Bay where the wharfs for the town would sit protected from the storms of the Atlantic.⁸ Colonial America was reliant on trade from its European supporters and this strategic location made that trade feasible. The location gave them the resources not only to receive what they needed from others, but also to create and to sell in their own society.⁹ The maritime success of the colonial town was made possible in part because of its location. (Maps 1 and 2)

⁴ Antoinette Forrester Downing, and Vincent Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 11.

⁵ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 6 and 11-12.

⁶ Antoinette Forrester Downing, and Vincent Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 11.

⁷ Desmond Guinness and Julius Trousdale Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 6-28

⁸ Map 1, Historic Map of Newport Rhode Island, Accessed March 5, 2019, http://www.old-maps.com/RI/NewportMaps/Newport_1777_Blaskowitz_web.jpg . and
Map 2, Map of the State of Newport. Rhode Island Maps, Accessed March 5, 2019, <http://ontheworldmap.com/usa/state/rhode-island/> .

⁹ Desmond Guinness and Julius Trousdale Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 6-28

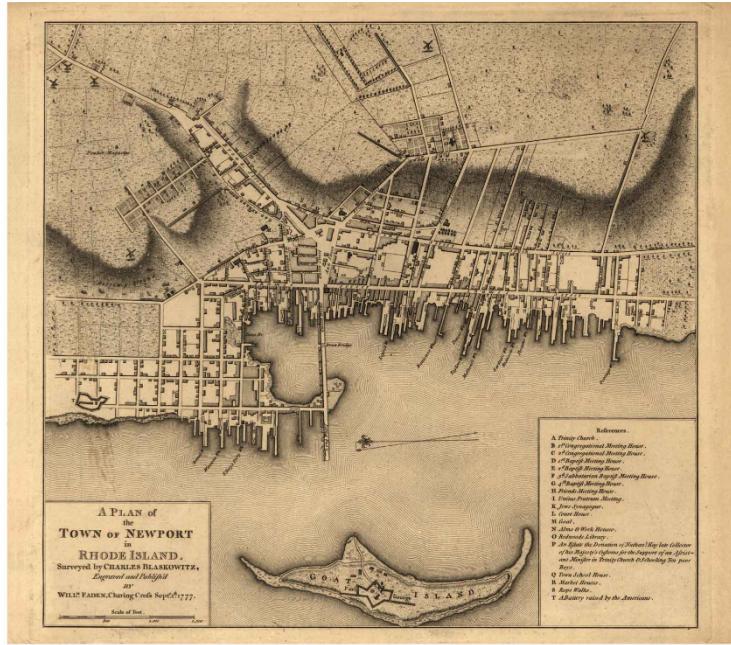
Due to the maritime focus of the town it became essential upon arrival for Newport residents to be able to build their own ships in different forms and for different purposes. Newport was not an economy based on agriculture, and they did not have the masses of land required for such a venture. That caused residents to be entirely reliant on trade for which they needed these ships. Shipbuilding was an essential part of the economy from its founding up until the 1700's.¹⁰ Building the ships provided an income, but selling the finished products made from the raw materials purchased in trade abroad was important. This included buying molasses from the West Indies and the English in order to create and sell rum. Newport also exported furniture to other Colonial ports such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston.¹¹



*Map 1: Contemporary Map of Rhode Island Showing the Location of Newport
Source: Rhode Island Maps 2019*

¹⁰ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 145-147.

¹¹ C. P. B. Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, (Newport, R.I.: Newport Historical Society, 1992), 13-15.



*Map 2: Map of Newport Wharf year 1777
Source: Historic Maps of Newport Rhode Island 2019*

The Narragansett Indians

When Europeans came to Newport they were not coming to a land entirely without inhabitants. The Narragansett Tribe had occupied what would become Rhode Island for centuries. Newport served as their summer home for agricultural purposes, though it does not appear that when the Europeans arrived the Narragansett were full time occupants of Newport. The natives recognized the area's climate and physical attributes long before the arrival of European colonists, but they did not primarily reside on the land. Instead they were there when the seasonal resources were to be harvested, but lived mostly on the main land of Rhode Island.¹² The Narragansett Tribe was a self-sustaining and thriving community before their first contact with Europeans in 1524. Though there were peaceful interactions between the natives and the settlers, the European arrivals ultimately led to the Narragansetts being driven from their homes and their land stolen.¹³ Roger Williams was a believer in harmonious trade and negotiations with

¹² Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*, September 9, 2014, Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YwnZTHatDbo>.

¹³ Robert E. Geake, *A History of the Narragansett Tribe of Rhode Island*, (Charleston: The History Press, 2001), 13-21.

the native people, however, relations with the Europeans were more often than not unpleasant. During King Philip's War, many Narragansetts were killed and women and children sold into slavery. The Europeans ultimately deprived the Narragansetts of their land in Rhode Island and some were driven westward to seek sanctuary with other native peoples.¹⁴

The Early Growth of Newport

The first settlers of Newport came to the area in pursuit of religious liberty on a level not yet practiced in any of the other colonies. The nine original settler families wanted "Liberty of Conscious" and the ability for all Christian religions to be together and not have their religious beliefs interfere with the governance of the state. The positive unintended consequences of this position led to welcoming of other religions including Sephardic Jews from Spain, Portugal, and Brazil to the new city.¹⁵ The town's religious tolerance attracted Sephardic Jews from South America and African who were of Spanish descent, a people who had been searching for an accepting home for many years since their exile from Spain during the inquisition. This community would come to thrive and prosper in Newport and their connections to these far-off places would in turn help the community grow and prosper economically. This is one example of the way that the community's acceptance of others helped expand their trade reach. In this manner religious tolerance helped the city and the individual in this experiment of tolerance. These connections and this trade to the outside world led Newport to be an integral part in the creation of the colony of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations.¹⁶ The new people brought an influx of different international connections that would be another factor in the maritime success of the town.¹⁷

The colonists did not find the area suitable for farming as they had originally intended. The soil and climate made the area less than hospitable to a community that might have

¹⁴ Geake, *A History of the Narragansett Tribe of Rhode Island*, 22-27.

¹⁵ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

¹⁶ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

¹⁷ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

depended more on farming. What the colonists did realize was the great sea advantage that they had because of their location on the Narragansett Bay. This was when their connections and diverse community helped to solidify their future and economic prosperity.¹⁸

Newport was a progressive society in many ways, it was open to people of many faiths. It would be a mistake to count Newport as a place for equal rights for all, however, because not all religions were treated as equals. Jews and Catholics were able to make great fortunes in Newport but were still forbidden from full citizenship and did not have the right to hold public office, limiting their influence in local government. Newport also did not escape America's dark history with slavery. Many Africans, African Americans, and Native Americans were slaves in the colony of Rhode Island and in Newport itself. Slavery in Newport was different from southern slavery. Slaves lived with their masters and not separately, many could read, were able to attend separate religious services, and attended social meetings like the African Union Society. Some Newport slaves were able to buy their freedom, purchase their own land, and became active members of local society, but they were not extended the same freedoms as others. The freed slaves could not hold office or vote, and in many ways they were still not given the full rights of citizens like their Jewish counterparts, but they were active members of the community, made their own social groups, and were able to create their own wealth.¹⁹ It is also important to note that Newport's financial success had a lot to do with the importation tax they put on the slave trade. The tax was one of the reasons the town was able to afford to pave their streets, because the community benefited financially from this trade.²⁰

Newport's nature as a maritime society left women in charge while men were out to sea, giving them more influence than many women in other locations. As men would come and go with shipments, women would be left behind to run the family land and households in their absence. This autonomy left them in charge of financial decisions, purchasing goods, and sometimes in charge of running family businesses. Women were often the more devout members

¹⁸ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

¹⁹ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

²⁰ Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 30.

of the religious community and had more freedom due to their physical separation from their husbands.²¹

Character of the City in the 1700s

Newport was an importer of raw material and an exporter of finished goods. This creating from raw materials made them a valuable part of the trade system.²² In the 1700s Newport was the fifth largest city in the Colonies of America. This happened because Newport was a center of commerce where people knew there were opportunities for economic prosperity.²³ Its fortune had come in great part from the triangle trade. Newport would export rum, which was traded for African Slaves, who were sent to the Caribbean and traded for molasses, which went back to Newport.²⁴ Newport also sent finished supplies to the West Indies such as furniture and candles.²⁵ The woodwork produced in Newport was also sent to other Colonial towns. Newport created what was considered some of the finest craftsmanship in Colonial America.²⁶ The furniture from Colonial Newport was noted for its ornamental features and attention to detail. This furniture was sold throughout the colonies and maintains its value in the antique market to this day.²⁷

Newport in the early 1700s was the capital of Rhode Island. It was also a Naval base, first used by the British to combat piracy with privateers. The connection to the Navy would be a continuous part of Newport's story up until present times.²⁸

Newport's expanding economy provided the trades with ample opportunity including carpentry, masonry, cabinetmakers, silversmithing, painters and clockmakers along with many

²¹ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

²² Guinness and Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, 13-17.

²³ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

²⁴ Guinness and Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, 13-17.

²⁵ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 104.

²⁶ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

²⁷ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 136-142.

²⁸ Guinness and Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, 26.

others. It has been said that in the early 1700s, “There was hardly a current trade, profession or skill that was not represented owners and builders of documented houses in old Newport.”²⁹

During the Colonial Period Newport also begins to become known as a summer tourist destination. The summer climate attracted people from Charleston, Philadelphia, the West Indies, and even some from Europe. South Carolinians enjoyed the break from the heat, the diseases and social unrest that typically came with the temperature in their southern plantations.³⁰ People came for a change in the climate and stayed because of the cultural atmosphere. The society of maritime work and climate of acceptance created a cultural atmosphere that attracted many residents. The theme of climate attracting people, local industry and encouraging them to stay is persistent throughout Newport’s history.

Along with economic prosperity, Newport was also known for its intellectual pursuits. The religious acceptance created an intellectual atmosphere that went beyond church teachings. The city’s diverse collection of people from different backgrounds led to teachings from disparate cultures combining and expanding.³¹ The Redwood Library is an example of this kind of intellectual activity, having been built in 1747 in order to give more people access to written works, although it was open only to those who could afford a membership.³² This intellectual “awakening” was not without its limits and biases. The town’s substantial population of Quakers also led to an Abolitionist movement in Newport. The Quakers argued that because so many citizens of Newport had come to the Colonies to escape religious persecution it was unconscionable to keep others from the freedom that they had sought.³³

In response to the Quaker movement and others, in 1784 Rhode Island passed laws making children born of slaves free, and in 1787 the State outlawed the trade in slavery. In 1794 it became illegal to trade slaves from foreign places throughout the United States. Newport

²⁹ Guinness and Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, 26.

³⁰ C. P. B. Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, (Newport, R.I.: Newport Historical Society, 1992), 22.

³¹ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

³² Redwood Library and Athenaeum, *Our History*, Accessed December 5, 2018, <https://redwoodlibrary.org/our-history>.

³³ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

continued the slave trade into the 1800s, and between 1803 and 1807 it is estimated that 3500 slaves were taken from Newport to Charleston. As with many of Newport's trades, the merchants continued until the profit stopped despite law, it was about money.³⁴ Up until the American Revolution the Colony continued to prosper through its maritime pursuits and growing population.³⁵

Colonial Buildings

As a result of the prosperity that Newport enjoyed, and the subsequent economic decline, the community has the largest collection of standing Colonial buildings in the United States.³⁶ The Newport National Historic Landmark District, which does not include any of the Bellevue mansions, notes 1332 contributing buildings the majority of which are Colonial structures.³⁷ These buildings have had a great impact on the character of the town. These include, among others, Hunter House, White Horse Tavern, and Pitts Head Tavern.³⁸ Most of the Colonial buildings that remain are either in the hands of private residents or the non-profit Newport Restoration Foundation, which owns and maintains 70 historic Colonial properties.³⁹ Hunter House is under the auspices of the Newport Preservation Society. The White Horse Tavern and the Pitts Head Tavern were once owned by the Society.⁴⁰ One of the most famous Colonial architects in Newport was Peter Harrison, considered America's first professional architect. He

³⁴ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 252-255.

³⁵ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

³⁶ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

³⁷ National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, *Newport Historic Landmark District*, April 10, 1995, <https://www.cityofnewport.com/CityOfNewport/media/City-Hall/Departments/Planning%20Zoning%20Inspections/Historic%20Preservation/Maps%20and%20Info/NewportHistoricDistrictsIn.pdf>.

³⁸ Newport Historical Society, *Colonial Newport: An American Experiment*.

³⁹ Newport Restoration Foundation, *Mission*, Accessed December 6, 2018, <https://www.newportrestoration.org/mission/>. and

Newport Restoration Foundation, *Preservation Properties*, Accessed May 28, 2019, <http://www.newportrestoration.org/preservation/properties/>.

⁴⁰ Newport County Deeds Office. Research done on November 4th, 2018 by Hannah Miller.

brought the Palladian style of architecture to Newport. His works included the Brick Market, Touro Synagogue, and the Redwood Library, three famous architectural sites in Newport.⁴¹

The Revolution Comes to Newport and Maritime Industry Declines

Newport shipping superiority ran into problems when the English government decided to enforce tax laws that had previously been ignored. After the war with the French in 1763 the English government was in need of funds and so it enforced old and new tax regulations. This cut the profits from shipping goods drastically for Newport traders, who had previously been living in a much freer environment. During the French and Indian War Newport residents traded with the enemies of the British, which angered their motherland. The implementation of the Stamp Act in the Colonies only made matters worse and protests in Providence led to the Royal Navy's increased presence in Newport to show their strength over the local industries. This new presence in 1772 made it increasingly hard for Newport residents to go about their business unhindered.⁴²

In 1776, after Rhode Island abandoned loyalty to the British crown and two Rhode Island natives Stephen Hopkins of Providence and William Ellery of Newport signed the Declaration of Independence, the occupation of Newport became more intense. General Clinton and his army occupied the city, which caused the population to flee. From 1775 to 1776 Newport's population decreased from 11,000 to 5,300.⁴³ The occupation took down much of Newport's trading industry, as very little was able to come in or out of Newport.⁴⁴ The British troops occupied Newport until 1779. During this time, they used the town's structures as they wished and altered many of them to their satisfaction. Despite attempted French assistance, Newport was continuously occupied for four years. In that time their maritime wealth and superiority was depleted.⁴⁵ After the Revolution a decade passed by without a single new structure being built.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 72-85.

⁴² Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 27-29.

⁴³ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 30.

⁴⁴ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 28-30.

⁴⁵ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 28-31.

⁴⁶ Deborah Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2009), 18.

After the Revolution

Unfortunately for Newport residents, the end of the war did not bring back immediate maritime superiority or economic success. The city had been severely damaged by the war physically, economically, and many of its citizens had left. Conflict continued as Rhode Island expressly disagreed with other colonies on a new system of government. In 1790 the State finally signed the Constitution being the last of the original thirteen colonies to do so.⁴⁷

Newport sailors took part in an unofficial coastal war with French shippers, which only added to the local depression from 1797-1801. Providence then became Rhode Island's great port, having suffered less than Newport during the Revolutionary War.⁴⁸ Little economic improvements were made in the ensuing years. The devastation was made worse by the "Great Gale," a hurricane of unprecedented strength that shattered what was left of the Newport economy. It wasn't until the tourism trade was reestablished that the town would thrive again after losing its maritime superiority.⁴⁹

The Beginning of the Mansions

Everything started to change for Newport in 1825. Southern visitors, who had spent time in Newport before the war, and their relatives who had heard stories began to miss the more temperate summers in the city. With the start of this new summer wave of visitors came the need to once again build up the town.⁵⁰ Fortunately for Newport, despite its economic downturns, it had two qualities that would not change. Its climate and its location, which made for a scenic and pleasant visitor's residence.⁵¹

When visitors started coming to Newport they stayed in boarding houses and rented rooms, living with permanent residents of the town.⁵² The city opened the Cliff Walk, which looks out onto the Rhode Island Sound towards the Atlantic Ocean, as a tourist destination and

⁴⁷ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 30-33.

⁴⁸ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 33-34.

⁴⁹ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 32-35.

⁵⁰ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 18-25.

⁵¹ Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 117-119.

⁵² Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 43.

used the town's historic buildings like the Stone Mill to attract visitors in the early 1800s.⁵³ Following the southern families were the wealthy families from New England and New York who had heard about the place from their southern connections. The Northeastern visitors wanted to make their trips more luxurious with permanent summer residences. This way they could stay for longer, come and go as they pleased, and have a staff waiting for them when they arrived, in order to live in a lifestyle of grandeur. It was also becoming a status symbol to own instead of rent.⁵⁴

Alfred Smith took on the role as Newport's first real estate developer in the 1840s and 1850s. Smith bought land that others thought was undesirable, as it was rough and outside of the city center, cleaned it up and creating landscapes to attract wealthy investors. This land would flank Bellevue Avenue, which is where many of the large estates would be built and still exist. The area was undeveloped, and further away from the port, making it less appropriate for the merchants. For the rich who were looking for a view, it would become paradise. Having grown up in Newport, Smith was picky about to whom he would sell land, starting a pattern of selectivity in Newport society which would remain for decades. He wanted money and status to move into Newport, so he solicited those who he thought met these criteria.⁵⁵ In 1851 Smith partnered with Joseph Bailey and they developed Bellevue Avenue in a fashion meant to resemble Paris by lining the streets with trees. The wealthy clients wanted a vacation home with European-like luxuries.⁵⁶ Smith's dedication to the city created the landscape that would make it famous for its grand buildings. Though not having been born rich, he died a millionaire because of his efforts in Newport and his legacy lives on in the landscape he created. Upon his death in 1886 the *New York Times* obituary said, "Mr. Smith did much for Newport, and not a few of the

⁵³ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 18-25.

⁵⁴ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 43.

⁵⁵ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 18-25.

⁵⁶ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 18-25.

suburban thoroughfares so attractive to Newport visitors owe their existence to his energy and push.”⁵⁷

Wealthy and Famous People

Fortune returned to the town as seafaring enterprises began to regain their claims on the wharfs. With this and the returning vacationers, the character of the town began to change, so that, in 1853, the town officially became a city. Alfred Smith took advantage of the visitors in town and spent much of his time in the established hotels selling Bellevue Avenue property to guests already visiting Newport. He corralled the already interested visitors and persuaded them to establish permanent residency.⁵⁸ “Literati” started to descend on the newly rediscovered resort town. These included the likes of artist John La Farge, abolitionist Julia Ward Howe, artist William Morris Hunt, and author Henry James, who began writing about the town.⁵⁹

One of the first of the famous grand mansions built in Newport was Chateau-Sur-Mer for the Wetmores.⁶⁰ Patriarch William S. Wetmore had made his fortune from a combination of mercantile trading businesses and investments. He grew up in Connecticut, built his business in New York City, and then set his sights on retirement in Newport with his family.⁶¹ Built in 1852 the house would remain the most luxurious estate in the neighborhood for almost 40 years until the Vanderbilt’s exceeded the house in extravagance with their creations. This Bellevue Avenue house predated Alfred Smith’s clearing of Bellevue Avenue.⁶² Visitors to the Wetmore estate

⁵⁷“Death of a Millionaire: Alfred Smith, Newport’s Big Real Estate Agent, Dies Suddenly,” *New York Times*, October 27, 1886, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1886/10/27/106304610.html?action=click&contentCollection=Arcives&module=ArticleEndCTA®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=8>.

⁵⁸ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 311-317.

⁵⁹ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America’s Richest Resort*, 26-35.

⁶⁰ The Preservation Society of Newport, *Chateau-Sur-Mer*, Accessed December 2, 2018, <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/chateau-sur-mer>.

⁶¹ Holly Collins, *Rites of Passage: The Wetmores of Chateau Sur Mer*, April 4, 2002, https://www.newportmansions.org/documents/a_study_of_chateau_sur_mer_report_ii_rites_of_passage_the_wetmores_of_chateau_sur_mer.pdf, 1-8.

⁶² Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 311-317.

were inspired by the fabulous building and neighborhood and began to lay the groundwork for their own summer houses in the city.⁶³

The Civil War

The Civil War brought economic changes to the city once again. Southern visitors abandoned their cottages, not being able to come up North during the war or after it having lost so much of their money. Many Southern summer residents expressed shock that the city would side with the North, as southern culture and southern people were so intertwined into the city's way of life. The Navy moved its Academy from Annapolis to Newport to be more northerly located and further from the southern threat. Though the Naval Academy was only located in the city for three years, between 1861 and 1864, the Navy would remain in Newport for years strengthening the city's economy.⁶⁴ The Civil War had another unintended consequence in Newport. In the post-war days in this city, and many others in the world, the formerly wealthy found themselves in reduced circumstances while new families rose in wealth. This economic turmoil would change who resided in Newport in the coming years. The economic upturn in the North after the war created a society of the newly wealthy who were financially capable of rubbing shoulders with the old elite born Southern, and knickerbockers from the North who had been born into and raised in wealth.⁶⁵ The new financial situation for the southerners left many of them with no choice but to leave Newport behind.⁶⁶

After the Civil War - The Building Really Begins

With new wealth coming to Newport from New York City, more buildings and groomed landscapes were constructed. Being accepted into Newport society was difficult on its own, but once you were welcomed you had to build a house that showed off your wealth and status to

⁶³ The Preservation Society of Newport, *Chateau-Sur-Mer*, Accessed December 2, 2018, <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/chateau-sur-mer>.

⁶⁴ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 55-60.

⁶⁵ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 29-31.

⁶⁶ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 40-41.

prove to others that you belonged. This building extravaganza characterized the end of the 1800s and the beginning of the 1900s in the city, and the results make up the landscape of the city today.⁶⁷ Newport is synonymous with two other phrases that explain its situation between the Civil War and World War I. These two names are the Gilded Age and the Queen of Resorts. As the Queen of Resorts, Newport was known for its lavish entertainment and expensive decor.⁶⁸ The Gilded Age was a term coined by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, it was a satirical expression for the overabundance of spending happening at the end of the 1800s. Now it is a term sometimes used to describe the architecture of the mansions built during this period.⁶⁹ The term also has broader implications that represented the changing atmosphere in the country as a whole. The United States had changed from, prior to the Civil War, being a rural based country to being more of an urban based population than it was before the war.⁷⁰ The Gilded Age was also characterized as having created great fortunes of wealth, while leaving many people destitute. It was a time of great social and wealth inequity.⁷¹ Though perhaps negative in connotation, it represents the era.

The Wealthy Patrons, Patronesses, and Their Houses

Money old and new came to Newport as northern titans of industry began building their summer cottages in the famed resort town. The Vanderbilts, the Goelets, Belmonts, Astors, and more all built their estates hoping to surpass their neighbors.⁷² The Vanderbilt's are synonymous with American wealth and industry building. The family began its fame with patriarch Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, who accumulated his wealth through railway purchases and control along with steamship transportation. His two grandsons William K. and Cornelius II

⁶⁷ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 11-52.

⁶⁸ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 47.

⁶⁹ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 49.

⁷⁰ Joel Shrock, The Gilded Age, (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), Accessed March 10, 2019, ProQuest Ebook Central, 1-26.

⁷¹ Hugh Rockoff, *Great Fortunes of the Gilded Age*, (Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2008), <https://www-nber-org.proxy.library.cornell.edu/papers/w14555.pdf>, 1-5.

⁷² Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 76-84.

were the first Vanderbilts in Newport.⁷³ William K. and his wife Alva built Marble house,⁷⁴ and shortly after Cornelius built the Breakers.⁷⁵ The Goelets were a New York City real estate family headed by Ogden Goelet, who in 1888 began construction on Ochre Court to compete with his brother Robert's house Ochre Point that was down the road.⁷⁶ The Belmonts were a family from New York started by August Belmont and Caroline Slidell Perry whose wealth came from being international financiers. Their ancestors on the maternal side had claims to American War Heroes, giving them both the wealth and the esteem that was essential in the Newport society. After they started to build in 1860, the family and their decedents would own many Newport properties including By-The-Sea,⁷⁷ and later Bellcourt.⁷⁸ The Astors were a New York family whose patriarch John Jacob Astor was the richest man in America upon his death.⁷⁹ The original Astor made the family fortune in real estate and fur trading.⁸⁰

In today's money these houses would cost hundreds of millions of dollars to build. The stories of the individuals who inhabited these houses are too vast to cover here, and have previously been covered in numerous books on both individual houses, family histories, and Newport Architectural Survey's including *Newport Villas* by Michael C. Kathrens, *Gilded: How Newport became America's Richest Resort* by Deborah Davis, and *Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island 1640-1915* by Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully Jr. To say

⁷³ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 359-360.

⁷⁴ The Preservation Society of Newport County, *Marble House*, Accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/marble-house>.

⁷⁵ The Preservation Society of Newport County, *The Breakers*, Accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/the-breakers>.

⁷⁶ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 365.

⁷⁷ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 353.

⁷⁸ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 367.

⁷⁹ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 356.

⁸⁰ The Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, *Astor Family*, Accessed February 20, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Astor-family>.

that the families were competitive would be an understatement. These socialites spent their summers trying to have the best dresses, stay in the best houses, and find the best spouses.⁸¹

One of the most infamous examples of this lifestyle was Alva Vanderbilt. Vanderbilt wanted the best cottage in town. She was staple of New York City society and wanted to make herself equally as important to Newport society. Because of her efforts to create the cottage that is now Marble House in a fashion that was greater than any other, the term “Vanderbuilding” was created. The term was an expression of out-building the competition, and this included family members and neighbors.⁸² Alva spent \$11 million on her house, which is the equivalent of \$260 million today.⁸³ She wanted the best Vanderbilt house, a challenge that her brother in-law Cornelius took on when he and his wife Alice decided to build the Breakers on the same road.⁸⁴ This was all happening in and around 1888, the year when Newport began taking the form we see today. The societal competition for the best cottage continued and many more grand villas were built into the 1910s.⁸⁵

“The cottages,” as they are called, were famous for their opulence and events. Those who hoped to enter the society one day and those who knew they never would have the option of following their whereabouts in the *New York Times* which published columns of gossip almost weekly every summer. On June 26th, 1888 the *New York Times* published an article listing who had moved to Newport for the summer. This was little more than a list to create envy. The list included the Wetmores, the Astors, and the Vanderbilts along with the location of the cottages they were staying at and the name of the estates.⁸⁶ These people had status and wealth and the world was going to know about it and care about it even if they never went to Newport or met an Astor, as the newspapers were going to share their stories with the public.

⁸¹ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 76-84

⁸² Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 44-48.

⁸³ Us Inflation Calculator. Accessed February 20, 2018. <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

⁸⁴ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 44-48.

⁸⁵ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 44-54.

⁸⁶“The Newport Cottagers: A Partial Directory of Summer Residents, New York as Usual, Takes the Lead in Populating the Elegant Villas by the Sea,” *New York Times*, June 26, 1888. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1888/06/26/112635387.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=6>.

The Designers

Many architects, and landscape architects, were responsible for the estates and public buildings in Newport. Three architects (two individuals, one group) stand out as the Gilded Age leaders of Newport's architectural superiority. Two individuals, Richard Morris Hunt and Horace Trumbauer, and one group McKim, Mead, and White created many of the houses and public buildings that have become iconic in the city today. Trumbauer was an architect who made a name for himself with his Philadelphia estates and whose clients then commissioned him for their Newport homes. He was the architect responsible for Newport's The Elm's in 1899, Claredon Court in 1903, and Miramar in 1913.⁸⁷ McKim, Mead, and White were responsible for many Newport properties. McKim also met his wife Annie Bigelow in one of his trips there. The firm was behind the creation of the Newport Casino, built from 1879-1880, a local club that would become very important to the social ranks of the town.⁸⁸ Their other Newport contributions included the famous Isaac Bell House in 1883⁸⁹ and Rosecliff in 1899.⁹⁰ Richard Morris Hunt was an architect famous for his Beaux Arts style, and responsible for many Vanderbilt houses including Marble House in 1888 and the Breakers in 1892. He was also the architect behind Belcourt in 1893 and Ochre Court in 1895.⁹¹ Fredrick Law Olmstead contributed to many Newport properties and to the character of the town. Landscape architect Fredrick Law Olmstead was influential in Newport as well being responsible for the gardens around the Vanderbilt Mansion at Rough Point, and with his brother they created the gardens at Ochre Court.⁹²

⁸⁷ The Preservation Society of Newport County, *Classical America presents Newport's Favorite Architects*, Pamphlet of presentation August 18- September 5, 1976.

⁸⁸ Samuel G and Elizabeth White, (*Mckim, Mead and White: The Masterworks*. New York: Rizzoli, 2003), 23-37.

⁸⁹ The Preservation Society of Newport County, *Isaac Bell House*, Accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/isaac-bell-house>.

⁹⁰ The Preservation Society of Newport County, *Rosecliff*, Accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/rosecliff>.

⁹¹ The Preservation Society of Newport County, *Classical America presents Newport's Favorite Architects*.

⁹² Michael C. Kathrens, *Newport Villas: The Revival Styles 1885-1935*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2009), 62-69.

The Society

The wealthiest citizens in America were socialites, bankers, and tycoons of industry. They built these estates to entertain their other wealthy friends and show off their wealth. This summer resort came alive for a few weeks every year and was run by a few women who put themselves in charge of the social scene.⁹³ These women and their daughters would spend their weeks in Newport while their husbands and fathers went back and forth from their place of work, putting the women in the driver's seat of society.⁹⁴ Mrs. Caroline Webster Schermerhorn Astor made herself the leader of this exclusive enclave. She worried that her daughters might meet the wrong sorts of people so she created a list of the right sorts who would be invited to her annual balls at Newport and whom would be therefore welcome members in elite society. She was not the only one who thought this way and so she and her group of friends became the gatekeepers of society in the summer town.⁹⁵

Getting on this list was important; so too was staying on it. In order to do that one had to throw lavish parties to make sure you were included and invited to the other parties. Party snubs even resulted in business retaliations.⁹⁶ Just because you were rich and accepted into society in other cities did not mean you would be accepted in Newport. Mrs. Astor implemented a three season trial period for those who wanted to be socialites.⁹⁷ Despite the reputation the city had as a tourist town, the rich came in and did their best to keep the rest of society out. They wanted no more tourists in their city. When the biggest hotel burned down society folks stopped it from being rebuilt in an attempt to keep more tourists away by drastically limiting the rooms available. Many members' only clubs, like the Newport Casino, created more exclusivity so that average tourists were not allowed entrance to them.⁹⁸ Mrs. Astor's list was a list of 400 people whom she thought acceptable, 400 was a significant number because that was how many people she could

⁹³ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 36-54 and 76-84.

⁹⁴ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 76-87.

⁹⁵ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 31-36.

⁹⁶ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 88-103.

⁹⁷ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 37.

⁹⁸ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 68-75.

fit into her ballroom. This was an example of the size of one of the extravagant parties in town, these events ruled the town and were essential to both its reputation and status as the Queen of Resorts.⁹⁹ “Conspicuous Consumption,” a phrase that has been used in reference to Newport, is the practice of spending money in order to gain status. The houses, the parties, the items bought, and even staff employed were all purchased in an effort to become an elite society member and show one’s wealth.¹⁰⁰

In August of 1902 Mr. and Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt set out to throw the most expensive and lavish party in Newport’s history. The event was covered in the *New York Times*. The party required taking a New York theater company to Newport for one night for a private performance for the hundreds of Vanderbilt’s guests, a dinner, and then a ball, along with many other luxuries. This was one example of one party thrown in a season of many:

Some idea of the extent of the work which was necessary for this one night’s entertainment may be had from the fact that the theater and Midway required two gangs of carpenters working night and day for five days; the electricians worked for weeks arranging for the illuminations, and the florists were compelled to work night and day for several days to complete their task. In addition there was the closing of the New York Theatre for one night and the transportation of an entire opera company to Newport...¹⁰¹

An additional article in the same paper recounts the preparations that were held before attending the Vanderbilt’s.¹⁰² A party such as this was not only expensive for the people sponsoring the event, but also the people attending who had to outdo one another and for whomever would throw the next party because now this was the one to supersede. And this was far from an uncommon occurrence.

⁹⁹ Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, 47-52.

¹⁰⁰ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 55.

¹⁰¹ “Newport Dazzled By Vanderbilt Home: Most Varied Entertainment Ever Given at the Fashionable Resort,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1902, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1902/08/26/101220880.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=9>.

¹⁰² “The News of Newport,” *New York Times*, August 26, 1902, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1902/08/26/101220881.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=9>.

Servants and the Support Staff

It is important to note that these rich socialites were not the only members of the city during the Gilded Age. If it were not for the servants and staff activities of all types would not have been possible. It took many a skilled laborer to run the cottages, a fact that would inevitably lead to the downfall of the Gilded Age society. In 1895, 10% of the permanent population of the City of Newport were estate staff members.¹⁰³ Without these staff member the houses could not open or close, the ladies could not change several times a day and have fresh clothes, and the parties could not be had.¹⁰⁴ Several families maintained full time staff, which would travel with them as they switched houses. The head butler would typically go to open the Newport house a few weeks before the family was due to arrive and then proceed to hire necessary staff to work for the summer. There were employment agencies in Newport specifically for this purpose.¹⁰⁵ Many Newport residents also left a caretaker in charge of their property during the winter to make sure the house survived the weather and any malice.¹⁰⁶ Though the rich were paying the staff, it was the staff that was depended upon and without whom the estates could not be maintained. The building and the running of these estates required the expansion of the rest of the city, not just the mansions. Immigrants from Scotland, Ireland, and Italy settled in Newport to work as carpenters and servants in the estates. This required new housing throughout the city. These people also became a large part of the year-round residents of Newport, so shops sprang up in town to support their needs.¹⁰⁷ The requirements of the estates changed the entire character of the city as they became an industry in and of themselves.

¹⁰³ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 56.

¹⁰⁴ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 55-67.

¹⁰⁵ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 404.

¹⁰⁶Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort* 63.

¹⁰⁷ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 356.

The End of the Era

By 1913 Mrs. Astor had passed away,¹⁰⁸ and Alva Vanderbilt, who had become Alva Belmont, had left the country after both her and her daughter each had a scandalous divorce and she became a suffragette.¹⁰⁹ The Gilded Age was changing as these leading ladies were leaving the scene.¹¹⁰ From the 1880s to the eve of World War I society had run as Mrs. Astor had wanted and now a new generation would have to take up the mantle. What the Newporters did not know was that the upcoming war would have unintended consequences for their lifestyles and as a new generation took over the city, a new organization would have to spring up to save its history.

Conclusion

The founding of Newport was focused on the maritime activities of the Colonial settlers and the religious freedoms that they could give themselves and other residents, which were not being allowed in other colonies or countries. Through time the water remained important to the city's economy and aesthetic enjoyment. The Navy's presence there and the maritime trade were essential pieces of the economy in Newport that continued through their history. The economic drivers were made possible by the climate and location. These same features would attract the wealthy, as the climate and environment were more relaxed than their permanent homes. In the seaside town of Newport they could temporarily escape the more hectic cities they resided in for the majority of the year. The part time and full-time residents created houses that would live long past their owners as representations of the era they were built, and icons of the past. The society and people in Newport evolved from maritime, to Naval, to leisure summer tourists. Newport was home to all ranks of society creating a unique environment in a relatively small city. Those most often associated with the city the Vanderbilts, Astors and the like, reigned for what was really only a short time but left their mark on the landscape and character of the town. The ever-

¹⁰⁸ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort* 96.

¹⁰⁹ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 411.

¹¹⁰ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 88-103 and 130-144

evolving city would face new changes as the city endured the end of the Gilded Age, World War I, the Depression, and World War II. Much of its historic character would remain, and that was not by chance.

CHAPTER TWO: THE END OF AN ERA, AND THE BEGINING OF A NEW ONE FOR NEWPORT 1914-1970s

Introduction

As World War One approached America, Newport was still a thriving resort for the wealthy and elite. However, the beginning to the end of the Gilded Age for the city and the country came in 1914 with the introduction of new taxes that would impact all citizens. The wealthy had previously not been subjected to income tax. The elite were not used to having to give to the federal government in this new manner, or to this extent. A percentage of their income would be given to their government instead of used at their discretion which was detrimental to their extravagant lifestyles.

The conclusion of the Gilded Age in Newport and the town's revival as a resort destination during the 20th century happened with remarkable speed. Perhaps it did not seem that way for those who lived through it, but from a historic perspective its decline and its new beginning are only about 40 years apart. This chapter will discuss the rise of income tax, the effect of World War I on Newport, the activities of the roaring twenties, the Depression, the decline of the mansions during World War II and what events led to the beginning of the Preservation Society of Newport County. The town changed as the world changed, but the Preservation Society helped to reinvigorate Newport into the place known today for its architecture, tourism, and beauty. This is how that transformation happened.

Amendment of 1913 and the Taxes to Follow

In 1913 the 16th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified, which created the first federal income tax laws in the United States. These taxes were issued to support the economy and later to help with the war efforts going into World War I.¹¹¹ In 1914 the initial wave of these

¹¹¹ Joseph R. Fishkin, William E. Forbath, and Erik M. Jenson. National Constitutional Center, *The Sixteenth Amendment*, Accessed December 19, 2018, <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments/amendment-xvi>.

payments was due. For the average person this new tax may not have been extreme, because it was percentage based, for some it was a very small amount. All Americans were hit by this tax that they had not been required to pay before this 1913 act. Prior to this taxation they owed the government nothing based on their income. For the extremely wealthy, like the owners of the cottages in Newport, it was a different matter entirely claiming what would amount to be a fortune to other people.¹¹² What started in 1913 would continue a taxation trend that would go forward into present times, though fluxuating, the tax has not been removed since its establishment in 1913 and has at time cost the wealthy a large portion of their wealth.¹¹³

As the tax law went into effect many wealthy members of society found loopholes so they did not have to pay as much as may have been expected.¹¹⁴ Less wealthy members of society were less likely to find these same “loopholes” and it is likely that they were therefore proportionally paying more taxes than the mega wealthy. The impact on their finances may have been greater then those who resided in the cottages.

This is an abbreviated history of this taxation evolution. Couples filing jointly who made over \$500,000, which was the highest bracket, were taxed 7%. The lowest bracket, making between \$0 and \$20,000, were taxed 1%. In 1916 couples making over \$500,000 were taxed 12% while couples making over \$2,000,000 were taxed at 15%. In 1917, when the United States entered the first World War, the numbers were 54% of income if couples were making over \$500,000 to 67% at the highest bracket above \$2,000,000. In 1918 the numbers went up to 77% for the highest tax bracket, which was now lowered to \$1,000,000. The next year the highest level of \$1,000,000 went down to 73% taxation rate. The next major change was in 1922, after the Revenue Act of 1921, when the highest bracket was lowered to \$200,000 and taxed at 58%. The Revenue Act of 1926 changed the highest bracket to \$100,000 and taxed at 25% where it stayed until 1932. The Revenue Act of 1932 made the highest tax bracket over \$1,000,000 and

¹¹² Deborah Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2009) 117-119.

¹¹³ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 117-118

¹¹⁴ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 117-118.

taxed that at 63%. Revenue Act of 1936 made the highest tax bracket \$5,000,000 which was taxed at 79%. In 1941 this bracket went up to being taxed at 81% due to the Revenue Act of 1941. The Revenue Act of 1942 made the highest tax bracket over \$200,000 and every couple making over that had to pay 88% of his or her income to the federal government. In 1944 the rate went up to 94%. It dropped to 91% in 1946. In 1955 the highest bracket was changed to \$400,000, taxed at 91%. In 1964 this bracket dropped down to 77%. In 1965 after the Tax Reform Act of 1964 the highest bracket was \$200,000 taxed at 70%. The next major change comes in 1982 when the highest bracket changes to \$85,600 and was taxed at 50%. The highest tax bracket continued to be taxed at 50%, though the amount in the bracket changes slightly, until 1987 when the highest bracket was over \$90,000 and was taxed at 38.5%. The highest bracket goes between 30% and 40% for the remainder of the nineties into present times.¹¹⁵

These numbers were significant as it was a likelihood that the vast majority of estate home owners fell into the highest category of tax brackets and were charged at the highest rate. Many of the wealthy who owned homes in Newport also owned other estates around the country and so they were forced to downsize or eliminate estates. They had lived the Gilded Age without being charged any income tax. Taxes severely restricted their conspicuous consumption, their extravagant lifestyle, and their ability to maintain multiples mansions and explained in part the end of the Gilded Age in Newport.

On a national average the United States has had significantly lower tax rates compared to the United Kingdom, France, and Sweden from the outset until the present. In 1915, for example, the national average for the United States citizen was 6.54% while the United Kingdom was 10.6%. The United Kingdom's national average stayed roughly around 10% higher than the United States for this time period from 1913 to present hence affluent Europeans were familiar with taxation. The United States was not the only country dealing with these taxes, but they were the one of the latest to start them. Affluent Americans were affected by the taxes for the first

¹¹⁵ Tax Foundation. Federal Income Tax Rates: Nominal Dollars Income Years 1913-2013. Accessed March 13, 2018. https://files.taxfoundation.org/legacy/docs/fed_individual_rate_history_nominal.pdf.

time, and for many years at a growing percentage rate that was unprecedented in the United States history but familiar to Europeans.¹¹⁶

The 1913 taxation was the first of many setbacks the millionaires of Newport had that would impact their wealth over the 20th century. War was looming and with war more financial problems would arise and the Gilded Age would eventually end. While the rich were facing taxes they had not before, it is important to remember that many of them had made their wealth due to unregulated labor that had major negative impacts on the poor. These new laws forced the rich to pay but they also forced the poor to pay. The rich were forced to give money to the government in order to pay for the inequities they had created for the poor of this country.

World War I

World War I, known as the War to End All Wars, lasted from 1914-1918. The United States entered the war in 1917. This conflict would change the economy for the entire country. In Newport it affected both the extremely rich and the average citizen. The town was also directly affected by the threat of attack due to its oceanside location. The war would significantly change the demographics and attitudes of the town.

Society

As World War I started to dominate the national conversation, it became less acceptable to host lavish extravaganzas while so many were off fighting in Europe. Benefits began to take the place of Galas; a party with a cause was more palatable to the onlookers of society than a party for the sake of a party.¹¹⁷ Despite America's initial attempt to stay neutral in the conflict it became increasingly impossible for the average citizen to ignore the horrors of the war and the fact that it was affecting America. In Newport many people had connections abroad and were keenly aware of the atrocities taking place. One of Newport's own elite was killed early on in the conflict with the sinking of the Lusitania. Alfred G. Vanderbilt was on the unarmed boat sunk by

¹¹⁶ Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban and Max Roser. Our World in Data. *Taxation*. <https://ourworldindata.org/taxation>.

¹¹⁷ Nancy Sirkis, *Newport Pleasures and Palaces*, (New York: The Viking Press Inc., 1963), 91.

German forces. The frequent Newport visitor was just 38 when he went down with the ship.¹¹⁸ An article written in the *New York Times* two days after his death describes the impact the death would have on the resort town “That the Newport season will be affected by Mr. Vanderbilt’s death is probable because so many of the Vanderbilt family were to be here.”¹¹⁹ The local elite society were extremely linked to the happenings in Europe.

Newport socialites were exceedingly well connected in Europe. Many families had married their daughters to European aristocracy, including the Goelets and the Vanderbilts, and so the 1914 season was marked with worry instead of celebration. There were also families who were unable to go to their cottages because they were stuck in Europe and unable to return quickly, including several members of the Vanderbilt family. Celebration for the seasons throughout the war years was hindered because of the people who were personally entangled in the war, and the fear that the conflict would cause money problems for the cottage goers. It also was seen as unseemly to celebrate in the same extravagant fashion that Newporters had done before the war, now that so many were suffering personally, physically, and financially abroad.¹²⁰ Even before America officially entered the war its presence was very much felt in the Newport social scene.

The war also caused a staffing shortage in town. Though it was formerly fashionable to import staff from European countries, it was now frowned upon especially if that staff came from countries located on the wrong side of the war. Foreign staff, from both sides, were forced to stay in their country of origin, unable to travel for the seasons. Despite the high unemployment rate among the domestic population, the average American found it demeaning to do such house work, so the cottages became incredibly understaffed. In large estates this was a serious problem for the upkeep and management of the buildings.¹²¹ As for American-born workers, those who

¹¹⁸ Rockwell Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, (Newport: Redwood Library and Athenaeum, 2006), 416.

¹¹⁹“Sad Blow to Newport,” *New York Times*, May 9, 1915, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1915/05/09/301791342.html?action=click&contentCollection=Arcives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=3> .

¹²⁰ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 117-119.

¹²¹ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 117-121.

were not being sent to war or preparing for the war effort at home were generally interested in better conditions than what the mansions had to offer. The estates paid low wages, required specific social characteristics, like not wanting married women employees, and required round-the-clock obedience. With the strengthening of unions many workers did not want to or have to take a job with so many personal restrictions.¹²²

Prior to World War I much of the Gilded Age staff had been immigrants or foreign workers who came to Newport for the summer. During the conflict the foreign workers could not be employed in the US because they were either being drafted, busy with the war effort in their home country, or were no longer welcomed in American. The European immigrants who were already in the country faced similar issues, either being shipped off to war or no longer welcome in American homes.¹²³

The Navy

Newport's ocean surroundings, which had been so important to its initial success as a maritime town, also brought the community closer to the war. Though the Navy had moved its Academy back to Annapolis, it still had a strong presence with a training center in Newport. The Navy also owned Goat Island, part of Newport County, which they turned into a torpedo facility. Newport's physical interaction with the War first came in October 1916 when a German submarine appeared in its harbor. The boat was there only to send a letter to the German ambassador in Washington and no harm came to anyone from the incident. It was not long after that event however, that the same boat was only a few miles off of Nantucket sinking boats from Europe, which were trying to land in America. Newport's Navy base played a large role in saving the survivors who had been forced onto life boats as their primary ships were sunk. This sea warfare made it hard for Newport to receive essential supplies. While the residents were not

¹²² Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 60-63.

¹²³ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 422-423.

occupied by the war, they were restricted. This had a direct effect on businesses that had to ration heating because of a coal shortage during this period.¹²⁴

The Average Citizen

Not everyone in Newport was a Vanderbilt or an Astor and it was the regular citizens who saw daily impact of the War, even when the city was not in season. The summer residence was no longer on its three-month season schedule; it now had more citizens and responsibilities year-round. Once the United States entered the War the port town became a place for the Navy to ship people overseas, so the city was for the first time in many years fully opened for the whole year instead of just the summer to visitors. Rations took place for the residents as they did all over America, but more people were able to find jobs and so the city received some economic support due to the War though much else was being lost at the same time. Due to the Naval presence there were jobs for the Navy and jobs created to support the Fleet. The war effort generated more economic opportunities for the average citizens of Newport. Much was changing, not for the better. Newporters were going to war and supplies were being rationed, but the job increase was an unexpected benefit to the war years in Newport.¹²⁵

The Inter War Years

The 1920s

After the First World War ended, in 1918, Newport was able to restart its society seasons of parties and events in 1919. For many Americans the early twenties were a time of economic growth, but Newport millionaires were still feeling an economic drain from the new taxes. So, in 1919, the resort town went back to its culture of parties and splendor, but the parties were much smaller than they had been before. They were still large enough to create envy, and still so expensive that most people would never be able to afford to go to one. Some houses did close up

¹²⁴ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 416-419.

¹²⁵ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 418-421.

after World War I as a consequence of the tax amendment, but many remained open. Another side effect of the war was the increased Naval presence in the harbor. The city saw a continued presence of the sailors in the city. Along with the very rich were now the very average income sailors living side by side.¹²⁶ More year-round jobs were created to support the Navy, giving the average citizen more economic opportunity than previously.¹²⁷

Prohibition

The ban on alcohol throughout the country started in 1920, and continued through 1933,¹²⁸ and the oceanside town became an illegal importer like it had been during the Colonial era. Calling back to its colonial piracy days, Newport became part of a long line of the “rum row”, seaside towns that brought in liquor illegally. This new illicit income for the city did boost the economy, and speakeasies lined the downtown streets primarily where the sailors lived. Although drinking alcohol was prohibited the profit was very tempting, and the benefit outweighed the risks and the price of getting caught. Many local Newporters took up the trade despite the Coast Guard’s attempts to slow them down and stop the illegal activity.¹²⁹ This smuggling echoes the patterns of the wharf during the city’s founding. The sailors were not the only ones disobeying the law during prohibition. While it was illegal, the wealthy still wanted alcohol for their parties and galas and they found ways to make that happen through the support of the smuggling already happening at the wharf.¹³⁰

The Great Depression in Newport

Newport’s experience with the Great Depression was as unique as the makeup of the town itself. At the start of the economic downturn hopeful residents thought that the town would escape economic turmoil. It was believed that the Depression would hit towns that depended

¹²⁶ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 421-425.

¹²⁷ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 419-423.

¹²⁸ Britannica Academic, s.v., "Prohibition," accessed March 22, 2019, <https://academic-eb-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/levels/collegiate/article/Prohibition/610119>.

¹²⁹ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 421-425.

¹³⁰ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 422-444.

upon industry and those that's economy focused on tourism would be spared. This did not turn out to be the case. Newport was affected with the decline from its summer residents who were disrupted by the fiscal deterioration.¹³¹ On October 29th, 1929 the Stock Market began its four day crash, in a day known as Black Tuesday, which caused the year-end value of the market to have lost one third of its peak value for the year.¹³² Those who owned estates in Newport took a great financial hit when the Stock Market crashed. Prior to this the wealthy had lived in prosperity, as the twenties were a boom time, but the Great Depression was unforeseen. They had not prepared for the sudden economic crash as no one had predicted it.¹³³ Those who had previously made their living working in the summer estates were affected as well. In 1931 the estates were employing 202 full time employees, during the Gilded Age they had employed 3,000 full time employees. Many of these people who would have been employed by the estates, found work in the Navy during these years. Others, like the rest of the country, could not find work.¹³⁴

It was at this point in the 1930s that the creation of a new bridge opened up the town to lower- and middle-class tourists, who saved Newport from losing its tourist industry entirely. They were not bringing in as much money as the cottagers, but the day trippers were adding to the economy keeping it afloat, in a time when so many other towns were failing. Families who would have taken trips far away prior to the Depression were instead staying closer to home. The new bridge gave people access to the city for day trips and shorter trips to the city's iconic beaches. Many cities that had survived on industrial manufacturing before the Depression declined after the Stock Market crash and the decline in consumerism. Newport had never been a manufacturing town so it didn't suffer the same problems. Many conventions were still choosing Newport for their events, so the tourist industry remained. In an era when banks all around the

¹³¹ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 424-428.

¹³² Robert F. Himmelberg, Great Depression and the New Deal, Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated, 2000, Accessed March 21, 2019, ProQuest Ebook Central, xvii.

¹³³ Robert F. Himmelberg, Great Depression and the New Deal, Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated, 2000, Accessed March 21, 2019, ProQuest Ebook Central, 4-5.

¹³⁴ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 427.

country were failing, none of Newport's did, showing the relative strength in a period of struggle.¹³⁵

The cottagers had to cut back in ways that directly affected the average citizen of Newport. Many estates did not open, and some were sold. Marble House (Illustration 1) sold for \$100,000 despite costing \$2 million to build and \$9 million to furnish. It sold for less than 1% of its cost to create.¹³⁶ The motive behind this sale was possibly charitable, as Alva Vanderbilt Belmont wanted to support suffrage, but it was also an expensive estate to run. Though she may have wanted to donate the money, she would not have wanted to take such a shortfall in its sale, but there were no buyers who wanted to pay more for the property.



Illustration 1: Marble House 1910-1915
Source: Courtesy: Bain News Service, Library of Congress

¹³⁵ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 424-428.

¹³⁶ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 424-428.

Even some of the wealthy who could afford to stay chose to leave because they had multiple houses in different locations, many cheaper than Newport. Newport survived the Depression in large part because of the continued Naval presence. The business on the wharf and the hotels, shipping and visitors also contributed to the well-being of the town during this trying time. Specifically, the Viking Hotel continued to house those looking to escape financial problems, staying open throughout the Depression when so many other hotels were forced to close.¹³⁷ Newport survived the Great Depression, but it was forever changed. The glamour of the Gilded Age and the large parties and social events had ended and would never be the same as it once had been. Great wealth had moved away from the town sometimes leaving estates behind, while the town itself survived with new types of tourists filling in some of the void that the mega rich had left. As one historian noted when referring to Mrs. Astor's former social sphere "The Four Hundred was decidedly dead."¹³⁸

Social Security Act of 1935

The Social Security Act of 1935 started another round of taxation that would impact the rich. All citizens had to pay into this system despite their opinions on it, which limited everyone's purchasing power and forced the rich to contribute to the health and welfare of the society as a whole, rather than just benefit from labor or the working class. Social security was put in place after the Great Depression in order to support members of society who were unable to support themselves and to create retirement plans for many Americans. Prior to this law it was traditional for families to take care of their own no matter how poor they were. The Depression showed that this was not enough, so everyone who worked was taxed and paid into the system. The system started with a 1% tax and slowly increased.¹³⁹ While 1% may not seem high, for the Newport millionaires that could easily be thousands of dollars they had to pay to the government

¹³⁷ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 424-428.

¹³⁸ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 427.

¹³⁹ Graham McCaulley, "Social Security," *In The Social History of the American Family: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Marilyn J. Coleman and Lawrence H. Ganong, 1247-1251, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014. doi: 10.4135/9781452286143.n495.

on top of the new income taxes rather than spending that money on summer parties. This again put strain on the ability to spend extravagant amounts of money on conspicuous consumption as they were doing before.

1938 Hurricane

In 1938 the severe weather detection procedures and prevention systems were elementary. Unfortunately for the East Coast they unable to help them with this storm of the century. No Newport residents were informed prior to the hurricane of 1938 that it was coming or that it would be so strong. The hurricane's peak hit Narragansett Bay at 5 o'clock, high tide, the worst time for a storm to hit, because it was at that time most capable of creating the greatest amount of flooding. The wharf blew away and the iconic Colonial houses on Thames Street were flooded with feet of water. In total, 680 people died in the storm, 420 from Rhode Island, and over 40 from Newport. The damage was estimated to be over \$5 million,¹⁴⁰ which would be \$17,809,007 in 2018 dollars,¹⁴¹ an extreme sum in 1938. Many of the boats that docked at the wharf were gone. This destroyed the maritime industry that was left in the town.¹⁴² This unexpected storm was a final blow to Newport's economy on its spiral down to an economic low point. The unexpected turn of events hit the town and forced it to begin rebuilding in a time when the residents and tenants could hardly afford to.

Newport in World War II

The Navy would once again play a large part in the next era of the town. World War II preoccupied the country as young men and women were shipped overseas to help in the war effort. Newport's seaside location again played a part in the military buildup preparation for War. In 1940 new housing was constructed for the Navy and they added more jobs to Torpedo Station on Goat Island. Narragansett Bay became the operating base for the Atlantic Fleet in

¹⁴⁰ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 428- 431.

¹⁴¹ Us Inflation Calculator, Accessed February 20, 2019, <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

¹⁴² Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 428- 431.

1941. The town grew accustomed to rations and drills for very real fears of attack. Parties and summer colonists were no longer a concern or factor in the city's day to day life.¹⁴³ The Navy provided a boost to the local economy.

During the War 180 of Newport's locals gave their lives in defense of the United States.¹⁴⁴ The rich supported war efforts with philanthropy. Women, who once spent their summers in ball gowns going to parties became volunteers, intent on helping the war effort either by raising money or supporting the Navy in Newport and elsewhere with altruistic volunteerism. Even if the estate owners had wanted to throw lavish parties, they were met with limitations due to food rationings. The luxury they had been used to was no longer available, or acceptable. Black out drills also rattled the city. As a seaport Navy town very real concerns arose about an attack and so the residents had to adapt to new blackout laws quickly. The cottagers changed their lifestyles completely with little choice or resistance. The Breakers became an air raid shelter, and another estate, Brenton Cove, became a messaging center.¹⁴⁵ The Countess Szapary of the Breakers was in Newport at the time, spending her days looking for enemy planes on the roofs of Newport buildings, while allowing her estate to serve a military purpose.¹⁴⁶ In 1941 Rosecliff (Illustration 2) was sold to a private owner for \$21,000, a fraction of the amount it was built for just a few decades prior.¹⁴⁷ Estates that used to have imposing galas were now too busy for such events unless they were supporting war efforts. The mansions were being used for purposes they were not built for, to support the war and the Navy stationed in Newport.¹⁴⁸ Some estates were not being used at all because of scared Newport summer visitors who didn't want to be so close to the action of the war.¹⁴⁹ Yet another sign that the glamorous care free days of wealth were long gone from Newport.

¹⁴³ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 436-439.

¹⁴⁴ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 439.

¹⁴⁵ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 152-158.

¹⁴⁶ Enid Nemy, *New York Times*, "Countess Szapary, 79; Led Newport Society," March 3, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/03/us/countess-szapary-79-led-newport-society.html>.

¹⁴⁷ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 438.

¹⁴⁸ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 152-158.

¹⁴⁹ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 152-158.



Illustration 2: Rosecliff 1910-1915
Source: Courtesy: Bain News Service, Library of Congress

After World War II

Whatever boost came to the economy from the Navy's involvement in Newport during World War II was reversed with the withdrawal of sailors after the peace. Goat Island reduced its numbers of employees drastically from around 7,000 to 2,300 in one year after the war was over. The Navy did add to Newport's economy for the next few decades but would leave the town slowly adding less and less to the town's fiscal state as it went. Newport remained a minor Naval center until the 1960s when a large portion moved away. Nixon decreed the final end to the Navy in Newport. In 1974 the Department of the Navy moved most of the remaining personnel to Norfolk, because Nixon had a more supportive constituency in Virginia than in New England.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 439-440.

Newport struggled between the 1940s and the 1960s to continually embrace the Navy, as the sailors needs, and habits drastically differed from the needs and wants of the wealthy summer tourists and even the less wealthy tourists that the town was still trying to keep engaged, then they were gone.¹⁵¹

GI Bill

The GI Bill created the opportunity for many men to go to college after returning from fighting during World War II. Many of these men would not have been able to go to college without this provision and would have sought jobs after the war that did not require advanced degrees to obtain.¹⁵² Some of these veterans would have been people who would work at the Newport Estates, however these new educational opportunities created by the GI bill provided new job opportunities for veterans and something different and better for themselves and their families. The worker shortage for the houses was significant, each of which required dozens of staff just to keep them running. The staffing scarcity created major problems for the estates' care.¹⁵³

The Sale of Great Estates

In many ways Marble House had been a key site in Newport society. The name of the owner, Vanderbilt, solidified its place as a high-ranking cottage. When constructed, it sparked building rivalries that would characterize the city and encourage others to be part of the splendor of the resort. It became Alva Vanderbilt's pride and joy, until she became ill and tired of the socialites in Newport and moved to Europe to be closer to her daughter.¹⁵⁴ The house was sold in 1933 for \$100,000 to Fredrick H. Prince, who added to it with the intention of making it less

¹⁵¹ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 436-440.

¹⁵² Virginia Held, and Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G. I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation*, (New York: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2005), Accessed December 19, 2018. ProQuest Ebook Central, 15-25.

¹⁵³ Alyssa Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, (Newport: Commonwealth Editions, 2015) 111-120.

¹⁵⁴ Amanda Mackenzie Stuart, *Conseulo and Alva Vanderbilt: The Story of a Daughter and a Mother in the Gilded Age*, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2005), 430-433.

formal, taking away from its initial use. The house was purchased for less than 1% of what it cost to build and furnish it.¹⁵⁵

Marble House was not alone, though it had been the first. Rosecliff also met a similar fate. Socialite Tessie Oelrich died in 1926 and left the property to her son Hermann who had little interest or ability in using the house in the same fashion or splendor that his mother had. In 1941 he sold the house to Abraham Leighter, a New York City Developer. Leighter auctioned off the contents of the house and sold the property to Anita Neilsen for \$21,000. She gave it to her daughter actress Gertrude Neilsen, who failed to hire someone to care for the estate. A pipe burst during the winter, flooding the house and she refused to pay the water bill that was extremely high. So, in 1942 she sold the property in a dilapidated condition to Ray Allen Van Clief, only because the bank would not let her demolish it without first paying off the water bill, which saved the estate.¹⁵⁶

Robert Goelet, a Newport resident who had lived in town with his family for years, owned Ochre Court. He could not afford to employ the 35 people it would take to run the estate, so he tried to give the property away to his daughter who rejected it. She didn't want the burden any more than he did. He attempted to have the house established as the new home to the United Nations, but this plan too fell apart. In 1945 Goelet donated the building to the Catholic Diocese of Providence and it would become the first building for Salve Regina College.¹⁵⁷ All of these owners found themselves unable to take care of the properties and so they had to get rid of them. No one got back nearly the amount that they had put into the buildings and few were initially sold to people who would care for them in an appropriate manner.

What Comes Next?

The economic state of Newport post World War Two had changed drastically from what it was in the Gilded Age. Gone were the days of the millionaires celebrating with no

¹⁵⁵ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 165-167.

¹⁵⁶ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 165-167.

¹⁵⁷ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 162-169.

consequences for the money they spent. What began with the taxation laws of 1914, and the Social Security Law and Tax of 1935, ended with a drastic change in the norms of society. From 1914 through the end of the Second World War, the economy and the makeup of Newport had changed tremendously. What remained, however, were the buildings from the Gilded Age and those from the Colonial Era. The architectural masterpieces could no longer be afforded as estates in many cases; the staff also could no longer be paid or found in large enough quantities to run the estates in the proper fashion. The buildings were there but what would happen to them next would result in the creation of the Newport County Preservation Society. The story that follows is how the Preservation Society came to be and what financial decisions it made to survive, eventually to thrive and contribute to Newport's fiscal success and economy.

The Preservation Society is Born

Katherine Warren, the Founder

Katherine Warren was not a Newport native, although by the end of her life her name would be inexplicably tied to the city. She grew up in California and frequently visited New Orleans. There she admired the historic buildings and their significance. This was the beginning of her preservation awareness. She had an Aunt who was a member of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, so preservation advocacy was in her family legacy. She had a cousin who lived on Narraganset Avenues at Oaklawn. Warren spent many summers in Newport as a teen, as a result of this familial connection. During one of these summers she met her husband to be, George Henry Warren Jr., a member of the Warren family who had been distinguished members of the Newport social scene for many years. She and her future husband spent World War I apart. He was a soldier and she was a volunteer, making them known throughout town as a patriotic duo. The couple married in the famous Trinity Church in Newport in 1919 and eventually moved into the historic house at 118 Mill St., which at the time was considered to be in an unfashionable part of town. During World War II she and her husband became increasingly involved in politics in

Newport, creating connections with political players and important members of society. They spent the winters of World War II in Newport volunteering.¹⁵⁸

Warren and her husband were frequent travelers, which influenced Katherine greatly on her ideas about preservation:

Katherine's love of travel influenced her investment in historic preservation. She often likened Newport's historic resources to the preserved sites she had visited in Europe, and through her travels gained an appreciation of the power of history to attract the public. 'It's just one of the things in the world that you do' Katherine argued 'you go and see what beautiful had happened before that can never be replaced.'¹⁵⁹

What was Happening to Other Famous Houses Post World War II

Katherine Warren was a distinctive and important figure to preservation in Newport, however Newport's preservation movement was not happening in isolation and in many ways reflects the ideals and patterns that were present in the rest of the country as well.¹⁶⁰ The first famous estate to be saved was Mount Vernon by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association starting in 1853, after concern for the estate's appearance sprung the Cunningham family into action to save it. This was often considered the beginning of the preservation movement in America.¹⁶¹ In 1923 the Thomas Jefferson Foundation started its preservation of Monticello.¹⁶² The Hermitage home of Andrew Jackson opened in 1889 in Nashville, Tennessee, another home opened by a ladies' association.¹⁶³ These historic sites started people's interest in historic properties in America, helping promote a trend that would support the houses in Newport. Also, of note was

¹⁵⁸ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 13-40.

¹⁵⁹ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 34-35.

¹⁶⁰ Michael A. Tomlan, *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*, (New York: Springer, 2015), 44-46, and Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 34-35.

¹⁶¹ George Washington's Mount Vernon, *The Story of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association*, Accessed March 15, 2019, <https://www.mountvernon.org/preservation/mount-vernon-ladies-association/early-history-of-the-mount-vernon-ladies-association/>.

¹⁶² Thomas Jefferson Monticello, *Mission and Vision Statement*, Accessed March 15, 2019, <https://www.monticello.org/site/about/mission-and-vision-statements>.

¹⁶³ Andrew Jackson's Hermitage: Home of the People's President, *Our Mission*, Accessed March 15, 2019, <https://thehermitage.com/about/>.

the female role in these institutions, a trend which Newport would follow as Katherine Warren led their efforts.

After the War, many historic mansions and estates of famous Americans were up for sale around the country. The need arose for a non-governmental agency to take care of these buildings as a result of many personal frustrations with government institutions not taking care or ownership of these properties.¹⁶⁴ In 1947 the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings was founded.¹⁶⁵ This council increased interest in Historic Preservation to the general public and resulted in the National Trust for Historic Preservation gaining its congressional charter in 1949.¹⁶⁶ It was within this national context that the Preservation Society of Newport County came to be. Preservation was becoming a bigger part of public awareness and the national conversation, making the way for local preservation organizations to grow.

The Beginning of the Preservation Society of Newport County

By 1945 Katherine Warren had established herself as a patron of the arts in Newport, and in New York City. At this time John Howard Benson, who was a local Newport Stone Carver, contacted her and her husband. The Warrens knew him and trusted his opinion so when he told them of the plans of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to strip Hunter House of some of its character-defining features, including its interior paneling, they decided they had to intervene though they had never been to the house themselves. With her husband and Newport residents Richard C. Adams, Edward F. Byrnes and William King Covell, Katherine Warren organized the 54 Washington St. Company.¹⁶⁷ This was a unique circumstance, in many cases in preservation a society must be founded to save a building. This situation was distinctive, is was not often that a building was saved from another cultural institution. Usually the destructive force is not one that

¹⁶⁴ Michael A. Tomlan, *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*, (New York: Springer, 2015), 44-46.

¹⁶⁵ Michael A. Tomlan, *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*, (New York: Springer, 2015), 44-46.

¹⁶⁶ Michael A. Tomlan, *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*, (New York: Springer, 2015), 44-46.

¹⁶⁷ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 59-80.

also practices its own form of preservation. They purchased the house on June 18th for \$10,000.¹⁶⁸ The group had no intention of keeping it as a museum. They only wanted to save it from destruction. The 54 Washington Street Company would be absorbed when the Preservation Society of Newport County was created on August 2nd, 1945, merging the two organizations. Initial members of the Preservation Society of Newport County included Maude A.K. Wetmore, William King Covell, Edward Frances Byrnes, Lawrence W. Champlin, Edith Wetmore, Michael F. Walsh, Richard C. Adams, Natalie Bayard Brown, Maxim Karolik, John Perkins Brown, and George Warren. Katherine would become the second president of the Society starting in 1946.¹⁶⁹ The Preservation Society restored the Hunter House to a period of significance of 1757-1779 and now presents it as a house museum.¹⁷⁰ With this first purchase the Preservation Society began a new economic initiative that would be introduced to the struggling city, and from this more would grow.

1940s and 1950s

Upon realizing that saving Hunter House opened larger possibilities, the Preservation Society invited the head of Colonial Williamsburg, Kenneth Chorley, to Newport in 1947.¹⁷¹ He suggested that the Society focus on the Gilded Age buildings and that they preserve them in the most historically accurate fashion possible.¹⁷² While Warren agreed with this outlook, she also thought it was important to save the town's distinctive character as a whole. She believed preservation was adding to the economy, saying, "There were hundreds of colonial houses, and what's the use of saving one? Let's save the whole ambiance..."¹⁷³ In 1947 Warren formed a disaster committee to save the buildings in the worst condition in the town. It was her efforts to

¹⁶⁸ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 59-80.

¹⁶⁹ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 59-80.

¹⁷⁰ The Preservation Society of Newport County, *Hunter House*, <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/hunter-house>.

¹⁷¹ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 174-180

¹⁷² Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 174-180

¹⁷³ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 64.

join preservation with the local economy that ultimately were met with community support and made her and the Society so successful.¹⁷⁴

In 1948 the Breakers was leased to the Society for \$1 a year from Countess Laszlo Szechenyi, the granddaughter of the cottage's original owner Cornelius Vanderbilt II. At this point the Society was paying for maintenance of the building while the Countess paid its taxes.¹⁷⁵ This was the first time average citizens were allowed into the famed building, for an admission price of just \$1.50. Around 26,000 people visited the once illusive house in the first four months it was open.¹⁷⁶ Playing off the success of The Breakers visitation rate, a ball was planned there in 1956 to mark the 175th anniversary of Rochambeau's visit to Newport,¹⁷⁷ the famed French general who stayed in Newport during the Revolutionary War and eventually helped America to win its independence.¹⁷⁸ This successful event was one of the first major fundraisers for the Society. It was also the first time since it had been under the Society's watch that the estate was used in a manner at all similar to the way the Vanderbilts used it and intended it to be used. After the success of that event the Society planned another one in 1957 at The Marble House sponsored by Tiffany and Company aptly named the Tiffany Ball.¹⁷⁹ This was before the Society owned the Marble House, having been able to use it by the generosity of the owners.¹⁸⁰ The Preservation Society had found a way to bring more attention to the sites and was solidifying itself as positive contributors to the local economy, while making other projects financially sustainable.

¹⁷⁴ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 66.

¹⁷⁵ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 10.

¹⁷⁶ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, chapter 174-178.

¹⁷⁷ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 189-199.

¹⁷⁸ C. P. B. Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History*, (Newport, R.I.: Newport Historical Society, 1992), 31-32.

¹⁷⁹ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 189-199.

¹⁸⁰ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Mable House, 596 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 37 Lot 18.

The Survey

In 1952 the Preservation Society published a book called *The Architectural Heritage of Newport Rhode Island 1640-1915* by Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully Jr.¹⁸¹ The book was published with the goal of reigniting interest in the town's architectural history. The book records the history of the surviving buildings in the town and notes their condition and comments on possible restoration practices.¹⁸² The authors also note in the forward of the book their assessment of the Society:

The Preservation Society is only six years old. It is not for me to give an account here of its accomplishments. The way it started-as the saying goes, 'on a shoestring'- and the struggle it had to survive those first years are healthy signs for its continued life.¹⁸³

The survey was not direct advertising for the Preservation Society, though they are the ones who funded it. This survey depicts buildings the Society owned and would own, buildings the Restoration Foundation would soon come to own, and buildings which were in private hands. The book's intent, as explained by the authors, was not to comment on the Society but to document the buildings in the city in their historic context. The text also highlighted the value of buildings from 1840-1915. In 1952 the focus of the Society was on colonial buildings, and the book also had a major contribution in placing a value on the 19th century buildings. This would of course help the Preservation Society, but it would also remain a record for generations and is still in use as a Newport survey text for the city's historic buildings. This reinforces the idea that the Preservation Society was promoting preservation in the city as a whole, not just for their own buildings, in an attempt to support the economy. The book was one of the first sources to focus energy on the historic and architectural importance of the Gilded Age mansions, which would later become a revenue source for the Society.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, Cover Page.

¹⁸² Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, vii.

¹⁸³ Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, v.

¹⁸⁴ Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*.

Efforts for Saving and More Preservation Activity

Warren was acutely aware that without community commitment and involvement the preservation environment would not be economically beneficial and sustainable. Warren hoped that Newport locals, who owned their own historic homes, would be encouraged to save them and pass them on for generations, creating an environment of hereditary preservation. Between 1962 and 1975 the Preservation Society gained eight houses in their collection. They purchased two and the rest were donated, trusted to them by donors who wanted their estates' legacy to live on. The increased excitement by local citizens caused the Preservation Society to be given more than they could handle. During this period, they sold the Auton House and the By-the-Sea estate land. Warren also began selling more property including 81 Second Street in 1963, Thames and Cross St Park in 1964, 30 Thames Street and Pitts Head Tavern in 1965, and the Auton house in 1969 and putting easements on them as the Society could not maintain them all, but wanted them all properly maintained. (Specifics of each sale will be listed in the next two chapters).¹⁸⁵

In 1968, over twenty years after the founding of the Preservation Society, the Newport Restoration Foundation was founded. This organization focused on the preservation of colonial homes. This Foundation rented out the houses that they preserved instead of opening them as museums. This created a taxable business for the city, something that residents were happy about. The Foundation was also responsible for the restoration of the Point neighborhood.¹⁸⁶ The classic story was that one day Warren and Doris Duke, famous socialite heiress and longtime Newport resident,¹⁸⁷ and the founder of the Newport Restoration Foundation, sat down over a cup of tea and decided that Warren would take guard over the 19th century buildings and Duke would take charge over the 18th century structures. Though the story is perhaps not an exact representation of how the conversation happened, as no one witnessed it in person besides the

¹⁸⁵ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 87-98.

¹⁸⁶ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 236-237.

¹⁸⁷ Newport Restoration Foundation, *Doris Duke*, Accessed February 19, 2019, <http://www.newportrestoration.org/doris-duke/>.

two ladies and neither of them recorded such a meeting taking place, that is how the division went and the houses saved.¹⁸⁸

Losses Along the Way

Warren's passions for her city, its preservation, and its restored economy were not met without struggles and challenges. There were losses along the way. She fought against the Sun Oil Company putting a modern gas station in front of the historic Colony House and lost. In 1954 she argued to save the St. Paul's Methodist Church Parish House and even attempted to move it to another location, but it was still demolished after four years of contentious arguing and efforts to save the structure.¹⁸⁹ Despite her best efforts and the efforts of those after and before her estates were still lost.

Renewal 1960s and 1970s

New Class of Wealth and Old Wealth Receding

By the 1960s Newport had established its new preservation economy in many ways. A 1960 article in the *New York Times* titled *Mansions Reviving Newport's Glory* summarized the new atmosphere best “This historic New England seaport’s old multimillion-dollar mansions are playing a modern part in the revival of Newport’s former glory.”¹⁹⁰ New wealth had come into the city including Doris Duke who bought Rough Point on Cliff Walk,¹⁹¹ and Jackie and John Kennedy who had become frequent visitors to the city and rented *Annandale Farms* in 1964 for \$2,000 a month (though they would never be able to move in after Kennedy’s assassination).¹⁹² The 1960s were also a time of people contemplating what to do with their estates. Many of these

¹⁸⁸ Paul Goldberger, “Restored Homes Bring New Look to Old Newport,” *New York Times*, August 25, 1976, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1976/08/25/75255777.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=31>.

¹⁸⁹ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 59-80.

¹⁹⁰ Merrill Folsom, “Mansions Reviving Newport’s Glory,” *New York Times*, June 26, 1960, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1960/06/26/99746270.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=313>.

¹⁹¹ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 229-231.

¹⁹² Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 204-212.

would eventually end up in the hands of the Preservation Society. Edith Wetmore was one member of the old guard who was trying to figure out what to do with her estate Chateau-Sur-Mer as she had no children.¹⁹³ Alice Brayton, the owner of the glamorous Green Animals Topiary Gardens, was approached by the New York Botanical Gardens to take the horticultural animals to New York City but she said, “she couldn’t bear the thought of the giraffe leaving through the front gate.”¹⁹⁴ She had no family who wanted the responsibility so she gave it to the Preservation Society. The Elms was one of the elaborate cottages that became a controversial property. The owner of the Elms, Julia Berwind, died in 1961 at age 96. Upon her death she left the structure to nephew Charles E. Dunlap. He, like many other recipients of these grand estates, was either unable or unwilling to bear the burden of the estate so he sold it, in 1962, to a New York Real Estate Syndicate.¹⁹⁵ The group intended to create subdivisions on the property, which is on a prime space on the famed Bellevue Avenue. This would have been an incredible blow to the town and its ambiance. The furniture and art in the estate were auctioned off for a total of \$115,620, a fraction of what all of it had probably cost.¹⁹⁶ In a fortunate turn of events for the Preservation Society, but not for the group, the real estate market fell, and the Syndicate had to get rid of the property. They sold it to the Preservation Society for \$75,000.¹⁹⁷ One month after purchasing the property an 800 person gala in the estate was held to show the impressive structure to the public.¹⁹⁸ This was an incredibly important purchase for the Society and town, because as the *New York Times* stated, “Whichever way the Elms blew, Newport was going.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹³ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 207-216.

¹⁹⁴ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 209.

¹⁹⁵ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. The Elms, 367 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 35 Lot 48.

¹⁹⁶ Deborah Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2009), 209-211.

¹⁹⁷ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. The Elms, 367 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 35 Lot 48.

¹⁹⁸ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 207-213.

¹⁹⁹ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 209.

Tourism

Tourism in the city was given a great boost by the preservation environment fostered by both the Preservation Society and the Restoration Foundation. In 1960 the Preservation Society had another fundraiser to restore historic buildings in town. They arranged for public tours of six estates, which were not Colonial, and for first time these houses would be open to the public. They were Eastborne Lodge, Clarendon Court, Rosecliff, Hopedene, Bonniecrest, and Gray Craig. For \$5.00 the Society would let people tour these private homes. An indication of how the Society was using their preserved neighborhood to raise money, even though at the time none of these houses were under their control. The houses were still owned by individuals while allowing the Society to use them for educational and preservation purposes.²⁰⁰ In 1976 it was estimated that The Breakers would have 250,000 visitors.²⁰¹ In one *New York Times* article the town was described as a “grown-ups Disney world.”²⁰² By the 1970s a new bridge had been built to Newport giving visitors unprecedeted access to the town. The wharf had been restored in the 1960s and 1970s, giving the town a more authentic feel. There were also the Yachting World Races, the America’s Cup, and the Bermuda Cup, competitions bringing more visitors into town.²⁰³ The Jazz Festival, which was established in Newport in the 1950s, had left the town for ten years but upon its return in 1981 added again to the economy and to the acknowledgement of the town to new visitors.²⁰⁴ The city was open and appealing to tourists in a fashion that it had not been for many years.

²⁰⁰ “News and Notes from the Field of Travel,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1960, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1960/08/14/99785104.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=355>.

²⁰¹ Paul Goldberger, “Restored Homes Bring New Look to Old Newport,” *New York Times*, August 25, 1976, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1976/08/25/75255777.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=31>.

²⁰² Paul Goldberger, “Restored Homes Bring New Look to Old Newport,” *New York Times*, August 25, 1976, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1976/08/25/75255777.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=31>.

²⁰³ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 233-240.

²⁰⁴ Stensrud, *Newport: A Lively Experiment 1639-1969*, 455-457.

Reaction from the Residents to Tourism

Some residents resisted the incoming tourists who were adding to the economy of the town. The wealthy that remained in the town opposed the idea of tourists walking around the Cliff Walk and gawking at their houses. The common residents had a different view and enjoyed the incoming money from the tourism, so initially reactions were mixed. Inevitably the best way for the estates to survive was to adapt to the new visitors. Doris Duke bought dogs to scare off visitors who walked on the Cliff Walk past her property. Years later she began a mission to restore some of the most dilapidated of the town's buildings to save the community. She was just an example of the extreme emotion of both reactions.²⁰⁵ In many ways, though some of the houses were open to the public, little changed for the average millionaire Newporter. In 1974 it was observed that the elite residents of the town acted as if inflation was not a problem. Although price inflation was affecting the rest of the country, the events would go on.²⁰⁶ Of course, the Preservation Society was still affected by the economy as time went on, though the city still was full of the rich the Preservation Society struggled. However, Warren hoped that a ball in 1974 would help her raise a \$2 million endowment for Rosecliff, this would become one of her many successful and famous fundraisers.²⁰⁷

Legacy of President Warren

Warren was aware that her desire to save Gilded Age structures would be difficult, but that one day they would be valued again.²⁰⁸ Many people were involved in historic preservation becoming part of Newport's economic growth, mimicking patterns seen throughout the country. Katherine Warren played a large part in Newport's economic, environmental, and preservation

²⁰⁵ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 229-232 and 236-240.

²⁰⁶ Whitman, Alden. "Newport, Where 'Inflation Stings a Little, but it doesn't really hurt.'" *New York Times*. July 19, 1974.

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1974/07/19/80423661.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=30>.

²⁰⁷ Whitman, Alden. "Newport, Where 'Inflation Stings a Little, but it doesn't really hurt.'" *New York Times*. July 19, 1974.

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1974/07/19/80423661.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=30>.

²⁰⁸ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 99-110.

efforts. As her biographer said, “Her emphasis on community engagement, divergence from the museum model, incorporation of historic resources into city planning, and the use of preservation as a tool for economic growth as well as overall community revitalization all anticipated modern, twenty-first-century preservation practices.”²⁰⁹ She began the patterns that the Preservation Society continues to follow. The next chapter will discuss the instrumental role the Preservation Society would play in the town’s preservation by interacting with properties by selling and putting easements on buildings in order to save the town’s historic atmosphere, and all how those interactions benefited the Society.

Conclusion

The Preservation Society was a recognized enterprise by the end of the 1970s having established a presence in Newport County and making a name for itself in the museum community. The Society’s principles helped them to expand and begin the process of buying more buildings, both to add to the town’s economy and its own museum collection. This process increased their presence in the community as they were expanding throughout the city and not just remaining on Bellevue Avenue or with only Colonial buildings. The Survey done by Scully and Downing helped increase focus beyond Colonial buildings and showed that Newport was filled with historic resources that were in need of support and recognition. This set in motion a greater appreciation and recognition for the historic buildings, more than had ever been known before to the general public. Doris Duke set up the Newport Restoration Foundation, the Society was able to shift its focus to the Gilded Age mansions that were not being supported as Duke took charge of the preservation of Colonial buildings. Katherine Warren had laid the foundation for the Society upon which they still grow. Though an everchanging Society, they still remain close to her founding principles to support preservation and in turn support the local economy. The town was now embracing tourism, historic preservation and the legacy that was being upheld by the Preservation Society.

²⁰⁹ Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, 82.

CHAPTER THREE: THE HISTORY OF ACQUISITIONS AND SALES OF THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY OF NEWPORT COUNTY

Introduction

The buildings, that have been owned by the Preservation Society of Newport County, came to the organization in different ways and for varied costs and reasons. This is the history of what properties the Society owned and sold throughout Newport County as well as some of the efforts made to financially sustain and restore the structures and land. This chapter also explores the various donors who made the purchases of these buildings possible, under what conditions the buildings were sold to the Society and what restrictive covenants and easements the Society placed on buildings before selling them to the public. This chapter is a history of these property acquisition and sales; an analysis of them will be presented in Chapter four. The time periods in this chapter were picked based on patterns that the Society was following, so the years are not equal in each section. Some years are also given their own section as so much happened for the Society in that year or because they are years in between periods of substantial happenings and patterns changing. Map 3 is a guide to the current properties owned by the Preservation Society taken from one of their brochures.



Map 3: Map of the Preservation Society of Newport County Owned Properties

Source: Provided by the Preservation Society of Newport County 2019 Newport Mansions Brochure

The Initial Years of the Society 1945-1950

The years 1945-1950 start this section as they are the beginning years of the Society.

President Edith Wetmore, the owner of Chateau-Sur-Mer and a longtime resident of Newport, first led the organization as president. The Society was not the first group interested in saving the Hunter House, their initial. The Georgian Society had already started an attempt to fundraise for the purchase of the Colonial building. The then unnamed organization (which would become the Preservation Society) combined with the Georgian Society with the main purpose of saving the Hunter House, creating the Preservation Society of Newport County.²¹⁰

The catalyst for the effort to save the Hunter House came when plans were announced that in 1945 the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City wanted to purchase the house and remove the interior paneling.²¹¹ The Hunter House is a Georgian Colonial, which dates back

²¹⁰ Katherine Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, (Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1954) 7-8.

²¹¹ Guinness, and Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, 96-103.

to around 1748 (Illustration 3).²¹² Due to its intact character the city valued the building as a whole. It was valuable to the Metropolitan Museum in pieces as they sought to display parts of it within the context of their already existing exhibits. The Museum's plans were to remove the characteristic interior paneling of the building and put it on display in their American Wing. This would have dismantled the existing structure.²¹³ The interior of the house is significant because, despite Newport's ups and downs, it has remained intact and is described as "the best example in the area of a sophisticated paneled interior of the mid eighteenth century."²¹⁴

After considerable discussion with Newport's preservationists, the owners decided they wanted to keep the historic house intact. They sold it to a corporation named "54 Washington Street," which purchased the property with the goal of holding onto it until an owner with the funding and a preservation plan was able to buy it. The owners sold it to 54 Washington Street for \$16,000, so the new corporation wanted the same amount from the sale of the property. In September of 1946 the Society was able to purchase the building after raising \$4,000 in donations and memberships and receiving a bank mortgage for the remaining \$12,000 needed to purchase the property.²¹⁵ The initial repairs to Hunter House were made by a donation specifically to pay skilled workers to correct structural damage and repair the first floor of the house so that it could be displayed to the public.²¹⁶

In 1946, after the purchase of the Hunter House, the Society started expressing desire to acquire the White Horse Tavern because it was falling into disrepair.²¹⁷ The oldest part of the building was constructed in 1652. It was turned into a tavern in 1673 and has remained as such

²¹² The Preservation Society of Newport County. Hunter House. Accessed December 18, 2018. <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/hunter-house>.

²¹³ Desmond Guinness, and Julius Trousdale Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 96-103.

²¹⁴ Guinness, and Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, 96-103.

²¹⁵ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 7-8.

²¹⁶ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 9-10.

²¹⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, Location in the Preservation Society of Newport County Archives at 424 Bellevue Avenue, July 11, 1946.

(Illustration 4).²¹⁸ By 1946 it was neglected, but not beyond repair.²¹⁹ The Annual Meeting Minutes from July 11th, 1946 stated the initial plans for acquiring the property. Originally, the plan was to sell Hunter House which would allow the Society to move on to saving the White Horse Tavern. Because the sale did not happen, however a different plan was required to acquire the property. The possibility of moving the Tavern was discussed but decided against, so the purchase was delayed.²²⁰

The next building, which would be purchased by the Society, was the Pitts Head Tavern at 5 Charles Street. Pitts Head Tavern is a colonial two-story gambrel-roofed dwelling dating to 1726 (Illustration 5). The building functioned as a tavern and dwelling throughout its history. During the Revolution and at various points it served the American Navy as housing. The Preservation Society's original plan was to make the house "a monument to Newport's tavern life and mercantile past."²²¹ In 1944 the previous owner, who wanted the land and not the buildings, gave the building to John Perkins Brown, who agreed to move the structure, to a different plot of land. The building was then allowed to stay in its original position and Brown gave the building to the Preservation Society for them to restore it and so that they might have an official headquarters. The transfer occurred in January 1947. The building was in immediate danger because it was structurally unsound. The Society had presented itself as having a focus on the saving of Colonial buildings as it purchased its second Colonial property.²²²

Also in 1947 The US Department of Internal Revenue recognized the Society as a non-profit educational institution, this allowed individuals to make donations as eligible tax deductions.²²³ This would be significant for the future of the Society and the willingness of the community to donate to various projects. This non-profit status was important to the Society as it

²¹⁸ White Horse Tavern est 1673: America's Oldest Tavern Newport RI, *History*, Accessed March 15, 2019, <https://whitehorsenewport.com/history/>.

²¹⁹ Downing, and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 167-168.

²²⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, Location in the Preservation Society of Newport County Archives at 424 Bellevue Avenue, July 11, 1946.

²²¹ Downing, and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 183-185.

²²² Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 9.

²²³ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 9.

would be to any preservation organization trying to establish itself as a philanthropic organization.

The Society began publishing the *Newport Gazette* in 1945, an inhouse booklet (which would later be turned into a magazine for the public) designed to report the happenings of the organization to the public. The first edition covered the years 1945-1947. It included a plea for \$50,000 to acquire the White Horse Tavern and repair it and also to repair Pitts Head Tavern. The publication also emphasized the Society's intended focus of saving Colonial buildings and used 81 Second Street as an example of a building that was being misused. The building was believed to have been built in 1741.²²⁴ John Goddard lived there with his sons, and the family became famous furniture makers.²²⁵ The sale of that furniture now brings in millions of dollars at auction.²²⁶ The *Newport Gazette* described 81 Second Street as a “tenement” and a historic site that hopefully the town would want to save.²²⁷ The Society did not own 81 Second Street at the time of the publication, but would later acquire it.²²⁸ This publication shows the Society’s initial interest in purchasing more historic properties.

In 1948 the Society started what would be the long process of acquiring the Breakers, which would become arguably their most famous site. The Breakers was designed for Cornelius Vanderbilt and constructed between 1892 and 1895 (Illustration 6). Famed architect Richard Morris Hunt created the building in the Italian Renaissance style. The house was richly decorated and well landscaped.²²⁹ The initial arrangement was that the Preservation Society would lease the Breakers from then current owner Countess Széchenyi.²³⁰ The Countess was notoriously shy and hesitant to let people into her home, which caused a previous discussion with the National Park

²²⁴ Christine Dunn, “Neighborhood of the week: The Point in Newport has Maintained its Colonial Charm,” *Providence Journals*, July 18, 2015, <https://www.providencejournal.com/article/20150718/NEWS/150719608>.

²²⁵ John Goddard House plaque at 81 Second Street.

²²⁶ Christine Dunn, “Neighborhood of the week: The Point in Newport has Maintained its Colonial Charm,” *Providence Journals*, July 18, 2015, <https://www.providencejournal.com/article/20150718/NEWS/150719608>.

²²⁷ *Newport Gazette*, Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1945-1978, Location in the Preservation Society of Newport County Archives at 424 Bellevue Avenue, 1945-1947 special number.

²²⁸ Newport Deeds Office. Property Records. 81 Second Street. Book 208 page 484.

²²⁹ Downing, and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 160.

²³⁰ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 10.

Service to show the house to never come to fruition. This initial hesitance led to a deal for a lease of \$1.00, even more exciting for the Society and President Katherine Warren.²³¹ Along with the \$1.00 per year fee for the lease, the Society also took on the responsibility of maintenance for the buildings and grounds of the Breakers and the Breakers Stables on Coggeshall Ave (Illustration 7). The undertaking was made possible by the Newport County Chamber of Commerce sponsoring the deal at the sum of \$10,000. This money was to support the cost of running and maintaining the buildings. On July 1st, 1948 the Breakers was opened to the public for \$1.50 per visitor. During the first summer season of the Breakers, which lasted four months, 26,000 people visited the house. This was a number much greater than anyone initially expected for the site. Due to this success the Society only ended up needing to accept \$5,000 from the Newport County Chamber of Commerce, instead of the initially offered \$10,000.²³² The Countess continued to reside with her family on the third floor of the Breakers, leaving the bottom two floors open for the public.²³³

In 1949 the Newport County Representatives to the State Legislature made it possible for the properties owned by the Preservation Society to be exempt from state taxes. This saved money, starting at \$400 per year for the Hunter House alone. The sum would grow as more houses were acquired.²³⁴ In the summer of 1949 the Society took responsibility for the exhibition of other Colonial buildings: Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, Trinity Church, Touro Synagogue, Whitehall, and the Old Colony House. These historic structures were made available for tours along with the Hunter House and the Breakers. The Society saw the key to their success was in offering programs to the public.²³⁵ While the organization did not acquire any of these additional structures at this time they took responsibility for their presentation and tours proving not only the ability to exhibit more houses but also the desire to do so.

²³¹ Alyssa Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, Newport: Commonwealth Editions, 2015, 69-73.

²³² Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 10.

²³³ Enid Nemy, "Countess Szapary, 79; Led Newport Society," *New York Times*, March 3, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/03/us/countess-szapary-79-led-newport-society.html>.

²³⁴ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 11.

²³⁵ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 12.

In 1949 the Hunter House's upper two floors were leased for five years to a woman who, as part of the arrangement, would put \$6,000 into restoring the house. This plan helped alleviate costs and was a way of ensuring that the house was always maintained while keeping the lower floor open for visitors.²³⁶

According to Annual Meeting minutes reports in the summer months of 1948, the Society invested \$16,847.86 into Hunter House and \$3,500.10 into Pitts Head Tavern. For the same time period ticket sales to the Breakers amounted to \$27,659.03 and to the Breakers Stables at \$816.96. After considering the income and expenses, including employee salaries, expenses, and repairs, the estimated loss for the remainder of the year ending in June 30, 1949 would be \$13,326.²³⁷ The minutes record that "By the end of the 1949 season the Society was in such dire financial straits that it was found necessary to cut expenses to the bone and operate with only a part time staff."²³⁸ The Annual Reports from the fiscal years 1949-1953 have been lost so there is limited information about the fiscal status of the Society in these years. In a Booklet published in 1953 however, the Society, says due to their own conservative efforts they ended the year 1950 "solvent."²³⁹ The first five years of the Preservation Society's founding saw the acquiring of their first two estates and the leasing of the Breakers. As the organization grew they acquired and sold more property through diverse strategies.

²³⁶ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 12.

²³⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, September 24th, 1948.

²³⁸ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 12.

²³⁹ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 13.



Illustration 3: Contemporary View of Hunter House
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 4: Contemporary View of White Horse Tavern
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 5: Contemporary View of Pitts Head Tavern
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 6: Contemporary View of The Breakers
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 7: Contemporary View of The Breakers Stables
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

Gaining Sustainability 1951- 1952

In 1951 and 1952 the Society did not add any more property to their portfolio. Instead the focus was on making sure the current activities meant they were financially stable. A major event that the Society credits with their growth was the July 23rd, 1951 issue of *Life Magazine*. In the issue were photographs of the Breakers and information about the Preservation Society. Warren attributed the magazine coverage with the doubling of the attendance at the Breakers.²⁴⁰ The Society noted this as “The event that will probably be recognized as the turning point in the affairs of the Society.”²⁴¹ It was the first time that published colored pictures displayed the grandeur of the buildings. When talking about the Preservation Society and the Breakers the magazine had this to say in part

Unoccupied since 1944, the Breakers is now leased by the Preservation Society of Newport County, a group of local residents whose purpose is to maintain and exhibit the outstanding houses and public buildings of Newport’s three centuries. This summer for the fourth-year visitors to the Breakers are being conducted on tours across the elaborately carpeted floors, through the immense, hushed halls and into the sumptuous rooms of one of the most extraordinary dwelling places ever built in the U.S.²⁴²

The funds that were coming in from the extra attendance at the Breakers helped financially stabilize the Society.

²⁴⁰ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 18-21.

²⁴¹ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 19.

²⁴² “The Breakers,” *Life Magazine*, July 23, 1951, 46.

Starting to Expand 1953-1954

The year 1953 began a period of expansion for the Society, not only in physical property but also in recognition. Two important properties were added to the Society's holdings by the end of 1954, the White Horse Tavern and the Arnold Burying Ground.

The Arnold Burying Ground was donated to the Society by John Howard Benson, who was a descendant of the Arnold family for which the plot is named (Illustration 8).²⁴³ The graveyard was founded in 1677, making it one of their oldest sites, along with the White Horse Tavern. Prior to it being given to the Society Alice Brayton, the owner of Green Animals, and John Howard Benson restored it and reset 64 fallen stones in the burial ground. After the restoration they donated it to the Preservation Society so that the site would have a steward and live on.²⁴⁴ Prior to this acquisition the cemetery was almost destroyed from neglect, and the Society saw this donation as a way of saving the site indefinitely "it should never again be allowed to almost disappear because of neglect."²⁴⁵

The White Horse Tavern (ca. 1652) was acquired in 1953, after the money for the acquisition was donated by Archbold van Beuren to honor his late father Michael van Beuren. The Society wanted the Tavern as long as they had been an established organization.²⁴⁶ The property was purchased for \$20,000.²⁴⁷ Plans to acquire the Tavern were noted in the publications of the Society as early as 1947. In the same publication the Society said losing the tavern to destruction would cause "national humiliation."²⁴⁸ At the 1946 Annual Meeting, there was a discussion of having a private citizen buy the Hunter House so that the Society could move their focus to attaining and preserving the Tavern.²⁴⁹ At a meeting in 1947 it was suggested that

²⁴³ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 25.

²⁴⁴ Preservation society of Newport County, *Arnold Burying Ground*, Accessed January 20, 2019, <https://www.newportmansions.org/learn/landscape/arnold-burying-ground>.

²⁴⁵ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 25.

²⁴⁶ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 25.

²⁴⁷ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, White Horse Tavern 26 Marlborough Street, March 5th, 1954, Book 184 page 58-60.

²⁴⁸ *Newport Gazette*, Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1945-1947 special number.

²⁴⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, July 11th, 1946.

the Society start their first national fundraiser to save the White Horse Tavern.²⁵⁰ The oldest part of the tavern was believed to have been constructed before 1673 and it started being run as a tavern in 1687.²⁵¹ The official survey of *Newport Architectural Heritage of Newport Rhode Island 1640-1915* said this about the tavern “No building could be more characteristic of colonial Newport or more palpably a part of its early history.”²⁵² The significance of this building was clear and so are the reasons behind the Society wishing to acquire it.

In the announcement of the purchase of the White Horse Tavern it was mentioned that the Society also acquired “two adjacent houses” to the White Horse Tavern, however, there are no official deeds that reflect the two other houses.²⁵³ While the deal was negotiated in 1953, the official records state the purchase as February 5th 1954.²⁵⁴ The booklet that references the two houses was published at some point in 1954 but lists the acquisition of the Tavern in its section on 1953.²⁵⁵ Either there was a deal which fell through or there were two houses on the property of the White Horse Tavern that have since been destroyed, but there is no record of either. This could be in reference to what would become the parking lot, which was bought by the Society later. This land did have other structures on it that were destroyed before the Society bought them.²⁵⁶ While the White Horse Tavern and the Burial Ground each had large mentions in this publication, the other two houses have one sentence together. It was clear that they were not the prize in the intended transaction.

At the end of the booklet, featuring the successes of 1953 and the beginning of 1954, the real-estate holdings were valued at \$77,833.58. The list of properties owned by the Society in the booklet are Hunter House, a Cottage at 52 Washington St., Pitts Head Tavern, Whitehorse

²⁵⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, November 25th, 1947.

²⁵¹ Antoinette Forrester Downing, and Vincent Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 167-168.

²⁵² Downing, and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 168.

²⁵³ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 25.

²⁵⁴ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, White Horse Tavern 26 Marlborough Street, March 5th, 1954, Book 184 page 58-60.

²⁵⁵ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*.

²⁵⁶ Interview with William Corcoran Lawyer for the Preservation Society of Newport County. Conducted by Hannah Miller on April 17, 2019.

Tavern, the Arnold Burying Ground, and two one family houses on 22 Marlborough St. and 16 Farewell St. The deeds however tell a different story. Hunter House, White Horse Tavern, and the Burying Ground all have recorded deeds under the Preservation Society.²⁵⁷ The property 16 Farewell St. was the parking lot of the White Horse Tavern and was owned by the Preservation Society, but not until 1970. According to the deed in 1959 the value of the buildings on the property goes from \$3,330 to \$0 implying that the building was demolished before the Preservation Society acquired it.²⁵⁸

There was no deed linking the Preservation Society to 22 Marlborough St. The property 22 Marlborough has been absorbed into several different plots since 1954, however the only deed which it could have combined with that has the Preservation Society's name on is that of the White Horse Tavern which does not show that it was absorbed.²⁵⁹ Again these two "adjacent buildings" may have been counted before the sale officially went through. As stated previously the White Horse Tavern, wasn't officially acquired until 1954 even though this article claims it was in 1953. This was a publication meant to excite people about the Preservation Society so it would not be farfetched to assume that the author wanted to list things that seemed like a done deal that could later have fallen through. As for the cottage on 52 Washington, Hunter House was properties 52 and 54 Washington, so the cottage may have been on the property at some point. The property next to 52 and 54 Washington would also come to be owned by the Society, but not for many years later so the most logical option may be that there was a cottage on 52 Washington that has been lost.²⁶⁰ The 1955 Annual Report listed real estate assets and included only the White Horse Tavern, Hunter House, and Pitts Head Tavern as properties they owned, again leading to the conclusion that there was some error in this publication.²⁶¹

²⁵⁷ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 28-29.

²⁵⁸ Web Based Records. Newport County Chain of Title Cards. Boston Scanning Company.

<https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. White Horse Tavern Parking Lot, 16 Farewell Street, Plat 17 Lot 245.

²⁵⁹ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, White Horse Tavern 26 Marlborough Street, March 5th, 1954, Book 184 page 58-60.

²⁶⁰ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Hunter House 54 Washington Street, November 20th, 1946, Book 162 Page 346.

²⁶¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, September 29th, 1955.

The financial statements for the years prior to 1953-1954 ending on February 28, 1954 showed that donations to the Society that year came to \$79,196.04, much of which went into the buildings including the \$20,000 donated for the White Horse Tavern. Administrative costs were \$36,881.68. The Breakers brought in \$234,254.64 and \$157,200.02 was spent running it, creating a major profit from that site, though the others were not bringing in close to those numbers. The booklet stated, “These figures are most gratifying in that such a high percentage of the receipts has been paid out in salaries and wages and thereby the community receives a direct benefit from the operation.”²⁶² These sentiments rang true to the then president Katherine Warren’s belief that this endeavor would strengthen the local economy of Newport.²⁶³



*Illustration 8: Contemporary View of The Arnold Burying Ground
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019*

²⁶² Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 28.

²⁶³ Alyssa Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, Newport: Commonwealth Editions, 2015, 72.

White Horse Tavern Troubles Begin 1955-1957

From 1955 to 1957 the Society bought no further property. The focus was on the two house museums already running independently: the Breakers, which was still leased, and the Hunter House. The head offices were still at 5 Charles St., Pitts Head Tavern. These years would be the beginning of the troubles with the White Horse Tavern. Upon initial purchase the Society had intended to run the Tavern as such, or to rent the space to someone who would run it in its historic manner. The inability of the Society to obtain a liquor license due to zoning laws and the proximity to a church made this difficult. The decision was made to operate the institution as a Tavern despite this inability to sell liquor.²⁶⁴ The treasurer in 1957, Mr. Smales, upon the opening that year said “Well now we are in the restaurant business and from the favorable reports that have come in so far I am optimistic enough or should I say stupid enough to predict that it will succeed.”²⁶⁵ To enter into the restaurant business with no previous experience in that field was a dangerous financial venture for the board to make.

Questioning the White Horse Tavern 1958-1959

The year 1958 saw no new acquisitions to the Society, the year did mark the beginning in what can be described as a lack of confidence in the running of the White Horse Tavern. At the Annual Meeting treasurer Mr. Smoles said this about the endeavor “Financially the operation has not been successful, however, we did make a profit in August and we hope to break even in September.” The inability to gain a liquor license made the project difficult. At that same meeting Warren emphasized that the Society was helping the local economy. By her estimation \$1,294,000.00 had been added into the local economy as a direct result of the Society’s efforts and creation of tourism in the area.²⁶⁶

Another contribution came to the Society in the form of land that did not come with an estate. In 1959 John E. Rovensky donated the funds to purchase property in honor of his late

²⁶⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 14th, 1957.

²⁶⁵ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 14th, 1957.

²⁶⁶ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 14th, 1957.

wife Mae Cadwell Rovensky. This made Rovensky Park possible (Illustration 9 and 10). The endowment with the park was \$175,000. It was a restricted endowment that was only meant to be used for the park.²⁶⁷ The deed to the property required that it be maintained as a park with no change of use, in perpetuity. The plot is located on Bellevue Avenue.²⁶⁸ This procurement ensured that at least this piece of the Avenue would be saved from development and the area would stay more historically authentic. Warren noted that “This is our first gift of major importance and brings to us the infinitely satisfying thought that we have thereby taken our place as a respected and permanent organization in our community.”²⁶⁹ In 1959 the Society also acquired their first endowment separate from the park valued at \$4,006. This year the organization moved out of their Pitts Head Tavern offices and relocated to the Brick Market (Illustration 11). The Market was leased for many years and used both as offices and as an exhibition space for museum pieces and collections. The Society was also responsible for putting money into its restoration and maintenance of the Brick Market, including a \$9,000 heating system in 1959.²⁷⁰

The November 1959 *Newport Gazette* had an article called “The August Lucas House.” The article described the pre 1750’s house (the exact date is debated within) that was located at 40 Division Street (Illustration 12). The house was up for auction on October 31st 1959. The Society had worried that the house would lose its historic integrity or be demolished all together if they did not purchase it. The structure was evidently in very bad condition when they purchased it, adding to the fear that another owner would not maintain it properly. According to the article the Society paid \$1,825 for the house. On the same day they found another buyer: Reverend Thomas Brown and Reverend Leslie Lang who were willing to buy the property from the Preservation Society one week later for the same price. The couple restored the house and made it into two apartments that could be easily reinstated as single family home. The article

²⁶⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 16th, 1959.

²⁶⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Rovensky Park, September 30th, 1959, Book 199 page 261-263.

²⁶⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 16th, 1959.

²⁷⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 16th, 1959.

noted that the Reverends would be occupying the house during the summer and that they had made their intentions clear to will the house to the Society upon their deaths so that it would be maintained properly in perpetuity.²⁷¹

The deed tells a different story of its transfers. While the deed does have both Brown and Lang's names on it, the Preservation Society does not appear. This could be because the sale was so quick that the Society never officially bought the house. In 1968 the house was sold by Lang and Brown to another buyer, not given to the Preservation Society as the article says they would do.²⁷² What the article did reveal was that the perception both of buying historic houses and having people entrust them with their houses after their death was very important to the Society and their public relations. The article was several pages long and took up more room than any other story in this edition of the *Gazette*. The depth of the discussion showed that the Society felt that the story was important, even though in the end they have never owned the August Lucas House at 40 Division Street. The Lucas House is currently a single family home in the hands of private owners. It was last appraised in 2018 at \$943,600.²⁷³

²⁷¹ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1959 number 5.

²⁷² Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. 40 Division Street Plot 28 lot 108.

²⁷³ Newport, Rhode Island, *Vision Government Solutions*, 40 Division st, <http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=4548>.



Illustration 9: Contemporary View of Rovensky Park
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 10: Contemporary View of Statue of Katherine Warren at Rovensky Park
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 11: Contemporary View of Brick Market

Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 12: Contemporary View of August Lucas House

Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

Membership Goes Up and Tourism Goes Down 1960

Despite the real estate movements in 1959, 1960 was a year that the Society had no new acquisitions. The efforts were instead focused on the betterment of the already owned properties. Rovensky Park was within reach of being finished and opened to the public. Membership was rising to over 1,000 and generally the Society was in a good financial position. Unfortunately, tourism decreased, this was attributed to both national trends and to new traffic patterns into and around the town making visiting the sites more difficult. The Jazz Festival taking place over the July 4th weekend, distracting people from what would have usually been a weekend full of house visits and exploration. The exception to the relative success of the Society was once again the White Horse Tavern. On September 11th, 1960 the Society decided to close the restaurant until someone else could be found to assume management. The issue of the liquor license was still undecided and was still causing trouble for the venue.²⁷⁴ As Katherine Warren said at the 1960 Annual Meeting “The Annual Reports on the operation of White Horse Tavern have, each year, become less optimistic.”²⁷⁵ The Tavern was the Society’s only attempt at restaurant ownership and, having no prior noted experience in the industry, it was difficult to see a way forward. Also notable in 1960 was the Society’s attempt to find a tenant for the Hunter House specifically a “middle aged couple” to “keep an eye on the house and accept minor responsibilities.”²⁷⁶ The Society continued to seek tenants in their historic properties as a way to keep the house under watch without having to pay someone.

Change of Headquarters 1961

In 1961 the Rogers House, on 37 Touro Street, was donated to the Society by the Catholic Diocese of Rhode Island’s Reverend Russell J. McVinney (Illustration 13).²⁷⁷ The house was built around 1795 and was used as a school by St. Josephs. While some of its original

²⁷⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 20th, 1960.

²⁷⁵ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 20th, 1960.

²⁷⁶ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1960 number 13.

²⁷⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, September 29, 1961.

features had been lost over time, it retained its three story square four room plan.²⁷⁸ The house would serve as the headquarters for the Preservation Society from 1962-1977.²⁷⁹ Also the Society began to sublet the Brick Market.²⁸⁰

At this time in addition to the Rogers House they still owned Pitts Head Tavern, White Horse Tavern, the Hunter House, and Rovensky Park.²⁸¹ The White Horse Tavern continued to give the Society problems in part because of its failed liquor license status. At the Annual Meeting in 1961 Warren said “The White Horse Tavern is one of our major undertakings, and we have spent much of the Society’s income in an attempt to make it serve its purpose in the community... At long last, we are very hopeful that we have found a Lessee who will take it over.”²⁸² The Hunter House was undergoing renovations, as was the Rogers House. Mr. and Mrs. David Van Pelt donated the funds for the Rogers House restoration, in honor of their son Charles Van Pelt. With the new acquisition of the Rogers House the Society decided to sublet their space in the Brick Market as they no longer had need of the space for their offices.²⁸³ Also in 1961 the Society bought the parking lot for the Breakers for \$10,000, a vacant lot across the street from the estate, which once held its own estate that had long sense been demolished.²⁸⁴ At this point they still did not own the Breakers but took it upon themselves to purchase parking for the site. The Society demonstrated that they intended to stay and had faith in the house’s tourist attracting potential, even though the house was not yet theirs. With the purchases in the year 1961, the value of property from real estate in fiscal year 1961 was \$263,847 and went to \$303,534.00 by the end of fiscal year 1962.²⁸⁵

²⁷⁸ Downing, and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 102.

²⁷⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 16th, 1994.

²⁸⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, September 29th, 1961.

²⁸¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, Balance Sheet, October 30th, 1962.

²⁸² Annual Meeting Minutes, September 29th, 1961.

²⁸³ Annual Meeting Minutes, September 29th, 1961.

²⁸⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 30th, 1962.

²⁸⁵ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 30th, 1962.



Illustration 13: Contemporary View of the Rogers House
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

Switch to the Gilded Age 1962

The year 1962 saw the procurement of the first of the Society's Gilded Age mansions, The Elms. Designed in 1901 for Edward Julius Berwind by architect Horace Trumbauer (Illustration 14 and 15),²⁸⁶ the Society described the Elms as "classical architecture of 18th century France, skillfully interpreted."²⁸⁷ Miss Julia Berwind, heir to Edward Julius Berwind, died at age 91 in 1961, and left the home to be sold at auction. The house was sold to a real estate syndicate, which quickly "changed its mind" and sold it to the Preservation Society. The Preservation Society was eventually able to buy the estate from money raised from the public.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ Henry Hope Reed, *The Elms: The Edward J. Berwind Mansion*, (Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1968) 1.

²⁸⁷ Reed, *The Elms: The Edward J. Berwind Mansion*, 20.

²⁸⁸ Reed, *The Elms: The Edward J. Berwind Mansion*, 24.

The official date of transfer to the syndicate is July 23rd 1962, the date of transfer from the syndicate to the Society is also July 23rd 1962.²⁸⁹ According to the deed the property was acquired for a sum less than \$100 so the exact price is not listed in the deed books.²⁹⁰

The Elms was purchased by the Society for \$75,000.²⁹¹ Members of the community became worried about the future of the estate and contacted the Preservation Society's longtime lawyer William Corcoran in the interest of getting it away from developers and in the safety of the Preservation Society's hands.²⁹² The acquisition was paid for by donations and in cash, so it is likely that it was written off as a tax deduction. The estate originally cost over \$1 million to build. Julia Berwind's nephew had auctioned off all of the furniture in the estate and despite the efforts of the Preservation Society to keep the furniture, much of it was lost by outbidding and left the house.²⁹³ The Society was able to buy about 5% of the original contents for around \$500.²⁹⁴ The rest of the furniture was bought largely with the intention of making it into props for movies for around \$115,620, a great sum, but far less than what it would have cost when originally purchased.²⁹⁵

On July 23rd, 1962 the Preservation Society also purchased five plots of land associated with the Elms: this included the Elms Stables, the future parking lot for the Elms and surrounding property. According to the deed, the sale was for less than \$100 from Katherine M. and Matthew J Faerber.²⁹⁶ These properties were a donation, made as part of a deal for the purchase of the Elms. If the Society saved the Elms the Faerber's would acquire these other

²⁸⁹ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. The Elms, 367 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 35 Lot 48.

²⁹⁰ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, The Elms 367 Bellevue Ave, July 23rd, 1962, Book 206 Page 556.

²⁹¹ Deborah Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2009), 210.

²⁹² Interview with William Corcoran Lawyer for the Preservation Society of Newport County. Conducted by Hannah Miller on April 17, 2019.

²⁹³ Cleveland Amory, "The Crucial Battle of Modern Newport," September 2, 1962, *The New York Times*, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1962/09/02/83517620.pdf>.

²⁹⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 30th, 1962.

²⁹⁵ Deborah Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2009), 209-211.

²⁹⁶ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, The Elms 367 Bellevue Ave, July 23rd, 1962, Book 206 Page 556.

properties for \$50,000 and give them to the Society so that they could steward the whole property.²⁹⁷

This addition of the Elms to the Society not only added to the value of their real estate but to their public persona. The publicity of the addition of the new property attracted new visitors to Newport and added to a higher visitation rate overall as people became more interested in the Society as a whole. Upon its opening President John F. Kennedy and the First Lady visited The Elms. They used this occasion to unveil the model national cultural center they planned to build; this brought even more good publicity to the newly opened cottage.²⁹⁸ Katherine Warren, thought that the publicity and acquisition were great for the Society saying “At times I have felt that the progress was terribly slow, however, this year I can honestly say that we have taken another big step forward.”²⁹⁹ At the end of fiscal year 1962, \$83,025.55 was put in the budget for the following year to pay taxes and to purchase the new property.³⁰⁰ This line item showed the Society’s intention to expand their real estate assets.

²⁹⁷ Interview with William Corcoran Lawyer for the Preservation Society of Newport County. Conducted by Hannah Miller on April 17, 2019.

²⁹⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 30th, 1962.

²⁹⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 30th, 1962.

³⁰⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 30th, 1962.



Illustration 14: Contemporary View of the Elms
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 15: Contemporary View of the Elms Carriage House
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

Tax Appeals of 1963

After purchasing the Elms property tax disputes arose that preoccupied the organization. The Elms was being taxed, though the Preservation Society didn't think that it should be due to their nonprofit status. It was not clear from the records why the Society was being taxed. In the words of Katherine Warren "All I can say is that the taxes have been paid under protest, and the Society has appealed to the board of Tax Appeals of 'The Elms' property, a decision is pending."³⁰¹ Clear dissatisfaction was sensed within the decision. As a nonprofit the Society was taking these buildings off of property tax rolls, this meant that less money was coming out of property taxes to be put back into the town. The estates that the Society was taking off of tax rolls were large and in expensive neighborhoods, which meant that the city was losing considerable money. This also meant a potential for that burden to be placed on other residents to make up for this lack of income to the government.

³⁰¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 25th, 1963.

On May 22, 1963 The Preservation Society purchased 81 Second Street, and sold it that same day to the Newport Gas Light Company (Illustration 16).³⁰² The property was bought and sold for the same price of \$4,500. There was no profit made from this sale.³⁰³ The purchase and sale of 81 Second Street was not mentioned in either the publishing or Annual Meetings of the years 1963 or 1964. It was mentioned in the first *Newport Gazette*, as a house that was a key example of the type that needed to be preserved in the town. The house was referred to as a tenement and specifically called out as one that the Society felt was important to the collective story of the town.³⁰⁴ The board voted the organization would sell the property on May 21st, 1963.³⁰⁵ There was no record of who funded the initial \$4,500 to buy the house. The money was likely given to the Society to buy the house so that it could be sold to a private owner and the Society could keep the money and avoid the burden of owning another property. This is only conjecture however because the house is not mentioned in any existing records. It is noteworthy, however, that it was mentioned as something essential to save in earlier publishing's of the Society, but it was sold anyway. The house 81 Second Street is now a single family home last appraised to be worth \$1,075,000 in 2018.³⁰⁶

At the end of 1963, on December 27th, the Preservation Society became the owners of the Marble House at 596 Bellevue Ave (Illustration 17).³⁰⁷ In 1888 Mr. and Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt hired Richard Morris Hunt to design the imposing Bellevue Ave mansion.³⁰⁸ In a booklet about the Marble house published by the Preservation Society it is described as “superb”:

What, then, is Marble House? It is nothing less than a superb product of the American Renaissance, built for the American family which has done more for American Architecture than any other. It is one of the monuments of the last flowering of the Renaissance of the Western World which began in Italy in the

³⁰² Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. 81 Second Street, Plat 12 Lot 17.

³⁰³ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 81 Second Street, May 22nd, 1963, Book 208 Page 487.

³⁰⁴ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, 1945-1947 special number.

³⁰⁵ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Board Meeting Vote, May 21st, 1963, Book 208 page 486.

³⁰⁶ Newport, Rhode Island, *Vision Government Solutions*, 81 Second Street, <http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=2446>.

³⁰⁷ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Mable House, 596 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 37 Lot 18.

³⁰⁸ *Marble House: The William K. Vanderbilt Mansion*. Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1965.

15th century, only to disappear in our own time, and as such to be treasured among American works of art.³⁰⁹

It was evident that the house was valued for architectural distinction and history, but it also holds great significance to the whole story of Newport. It was the house that inspired “Vanderbuilding,” competitive building of opulent homes, and changed the course of history for the resort town and its architectural Gilded Age heritage.³¹⁰ The house cost the Society \$50,000 to buy from the estate of Frederick Prince.³¹¹ The purchase of Marble House was not in the 1963 Annual Meeting as it happened after the 1963 fiscal year had ended.³¹² The house was bought by the Society using money donated from Harold Sterling Vanderbilt, the son of the original owners of the estate. The house’s furniture, some of which was designed especially for certain parts of the house, was donated by the Trust of Fredrick Prince.³¹³

It was mentioned in the 1964 Annual Meeting, but it wasn’t the main focus. Almost a year had passed from the time of its purchase and excitement about the acquisition seems to have given way to more focus on the poor financial status of the Society. Financial woes in the report were in part blamed on the purchasing of the Marble House and also on taxes the Preservation Society felt they were being unfairly forced to pay.³¹⁴

³⁰⁹ *Marble House: The William K. Vanderbilt Mansion*. Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1965.

³¹⁰ Deborah Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2009), 44.

³¹¹ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, The Marble House, 596 Bellevue Ave. December 27th, 1963, Book 210 Page 161.

³¹² Annual Meeting Minutes, October 25th, 1963.

³¹³ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 16th, 1964. And *Marble House: The William K. Vanderbilt Mansion*. Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1965.

³¹⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 16th, 1964.



Illustration 16: Contemporary View of 81 Second Street
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 17: Contemporary View of the Marble House
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

What To Do with Homes That Come With Restricted Uses 1964

Muriel Rogers Case gave the Thomas Gibson House at 30 Thames Street to the Preservation Society on December 21st, 1964 (Illustration 18). The house, which was also known as the John Stevens house, was built in 1709. It was a colonial single-family dwelling³¹⁵ that remained a home to members of the Stevens family for over two centuries. The house was enlarged to its current size in 1750.³¹⁶ Two covenants ran with the property when it was donated. The first restriction was that the exterior of the house would be “restored and preserved in a manner consistent with the original colonial architecture” and the second was that the house would only ever be used as a single-family dwelling.³¹⁷ This presented a challenge for the Preservation Society. The Society either had to become landlords or sell the property to someone else who would respect the restrictions. This was information that the Society knew before accepting the gift so likely they planned to sell the property as soon as possible and the restrictions were understood by the donor.

Meanwhile another property demanded attention. Thames and Cross St. was a small triangular park at the corner of those two streets that began the historic district at the edge of downtown Newport (Illustration 19).³¹⁸ According to deed records the Society bought the lot for \$10,000 from private owner Manuel P. White and sold it for \$6,000 to the city in the span of nine days.³¹⁹ It has been noted in the deed books that there are mistakes in this file but exactly what those were is unclear and why the Society would willingly sell this property at a loss was also unclear.³²⁰ It is possible that they effectively split the price with the city in the interest of the preservation of the land and the deal never had the potential for financial benefit for the organization.

³¹⁵ Thomas Gibson House plaque at 30 Thames Street.

³¹⁶ Downing, and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 218.

³¹⁷ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Tom Gibson House 30 Thames Street, February 1st, 1965, Book 213 Page 4.

³¹⁸ Historic Marker in Thames and Cross Street Park, U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service, 1968.

³¹⁹ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Thames and Cross street Park, December 9th, 1964, Book 212 Page 429 and Book 212 page 474.

³²⁰ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Thames and Cross street Park, December 9th, 1964, Book 212 Page 429 and Book 212 page 474.

The Society also bought land on Bellevue Ave, represented on tax maps as plat 37 lot 14. The property was purchased from Catherine and Ralph E. Gunning who stipulated in the deed that should the Preservation Society ever decide to sell it they should first offer it back to them before offering it to other interested parties. The Society paid \$6,600 for the property.³²¹ This lot on the famed Avenue would serve as the parking lot for the Marble House.

³²¹ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Marble House Parking Lot Plat 37 Lot 14, book 211 page 112



Illustration 18: Contemporary View of the 30 Thames Street
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

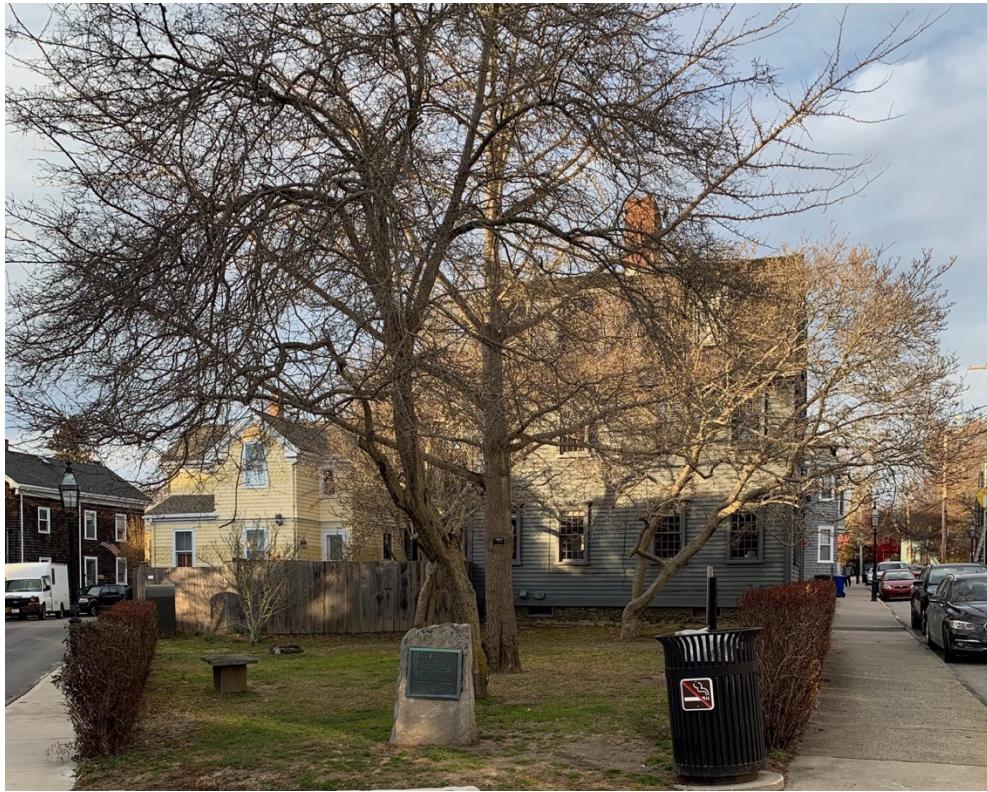


Illustration 19: Contemporary View of the Cross and Thames Park
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

Houses Exchanged Under Market Value 1965

The property at 30 Thames Street was held by the Preservation Society from December 21st, 1964 until January 6th, 1965. The sale of the house seemed to be more of a donation as the deed stated that the transaction was under \$100.³²² Evidence of a board members' vote on February 1st, 1965, the same day that the transfer officially went through, states that the Society was allowed to sell the property. Specifically, the vote was to sell it to Charles W. Wharton Jr. and his wife, suggesting they had a special interest in it or intended to preserve it.³²³ Not all sales were voted on; only those done under market value in exchange for the preservation of a site seem to have been. The house still stands now as a single family home and was last evaluated in 2018 to be worth \$759,000.³²⁴

The next purchase by the Society in 1965 was at 31 Walnut Street. The Society bought the property from Joseph F. and Gloria I. Silvia for \$12,000 (Illustration 20).³²⁵ This house was a Georgian Colonial single family structure built in 1750.³²⁶ In the 1966 the *Newport Gazette* discussed the purchasing of the Perry House at 31 Walnut Street. Mrs. Daniel Van Pelt donated the money for the acquisition, she was the same woman who donated the money to buy the Rogers House in 1961 to honor her son. The Perry House was the second 18th century home that she helped the Society to save. The deal was orchestrated by Mrs. C.D.L. Pepys, who was associated with "Operation Clapboard" a preservation advocacy group with a focus on the preservation of Colonial buildings.³²⁷ Neither of these properties' transactions were written about in either the Annual Meeting minutes or the *Newport Gazettes*. Without written evidence, one can speculate that this could mean several things: that they were not important enough to

³²² Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Tom Gibson House 30 Thames Street, February 1st, 1965, Book 213 Page 7.

³²³ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Tom Gibson House 30 Thames Street, February 1st, 1965, Book 213 Page 6.

³²⁴ Newport, Rhode Island, *Vision Government Solutions*, 30 Thames St, <http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=3448>.

³²⁵ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 31 Walnut Street, Book 215 Page 281.

³²⁶ State of Rhode Island: Historic Property Search Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, *Rhode Island National Register Search*, 31 Walnut Street, <https://www.ri.gov/preservation/search/view.php?idnumber=NEWP01126>.

³²⁷ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, February 1966 number 25.

mention, that the Society didn't want to advertise these properties, or that in this year there was less focus on this matter and attention simply went to other aspects of the Society's ventures.³²⁸

The primary discussion in the *Newport Gazette* for the year 1965 was the large tribute to Gladys Vanderbilt Szechenyi. The Countess, who owned the Breakers and from whom the Society had been leasing the property for several years, had passed away. In the May issue of the *Gazette* several pages were taken up in dedication to her, the estate, and her significant contribution to the Society over her lifetime.³²⁹ This also could account for the lack of information presented to the public about other property transfers. The Society may have been distracted by the death of the Countess and chose to focus on that as the more pressing matter to report on to the public.

In 1965 the Society sold Pitts Head Tavern, which had once served as their headquarters. At this point their business operations moved into the Rogers House at 37 Touro Street. After the Society sold the Pitts Head Tavern building, the building was picked up and moved to 77 Bridge Street where it remains.³³⁰ The building now serves as a single-family home most recently appraised at \$1,091,500 in 2018.³³¹ The former location of Pitts Head Tavern now has much newer buildings on it which serve as retail stores. Interestingly its new location is within blocks of Hunter House and Storer Park. Moving it after its sale made it closer to Society property though they no longer owned it.

³²⁸ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1965 number 23.

³²⁹ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1965 number 23.

³³⁰ *Historic Property Data Sheet Rhode Island Statewide Survey*. Pitts Head Tavern. Located at the Newport Historical Society Library.

³³¹ Newport, Rhode Island, *Vision Government Solutions*, 77 Bridge Street,
<http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=3135>



Illustration 20: Contemporary View of the 31 Walnut Street
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

A Year of Stabilizing 1966

The year 1966 was a year without new property acquisitions, but a year marked with additional responsibility for the Society. According to the Annual Meeting Minutes in 1966, the net worth of the Society was \$732,500 up from \$686,800 in the prior fiscal year. The Marble House's restorations were underway and different from previous projects as this was the first restoration project being taken care of by in-house staff. The Society no longer needed to hire outside workers for restoration work because it had accumulated skilled staff instead. Most notably in 1966 the Preservation Society took over more responsibilities of the Breakers estate

and Stables. In previous agreements the Society paid for only part of the Estate's upkeep and expenses, but had now taken responsibility for all expenses including major repairs and taxes on the property, along with the \$1.00 lease.³³² The Society maintained their \$1.00 lease with the Countess' heirs along with the new responsibilities until they would ultimately buy it.

The One Millionth Visitor 1967-1968

The years 1967 and 1968 were years that continued to improve what was already owned by the Society, along with the additions of some new property. The organization began the restoration of the Perry House and turning it into a museum.³³³ Mrs. David Van Pelt offered to restore the site as a museum of a collection of Perryana, relics of the famed owner Commodore Mathew Calbraith Perry.³³⁴ The Society also welcomed their one millionth visitor to their sites.³³⁵ The White Horse Tavern remained problematic, as they still could not obtain a liquor license.³³⁶ Despite having the local government on their side and the support of public radio stations, the Society still could not obtain the liquor license, which was essential to the financial health of the Tavern.³³⁷ There were multiple pleas from the Society to the public to individually save Colonial houses around Newport, as at the time they were one of the only organizations doing so. They saw public support as a necessity to the city's future and the continued preservation of these buildings and the historic environment.³³⁸ This again showed the initial emphasis of the Society on Colonial sites in the county. In the last issue of the *Newport Gazette* for 1968 it was announced that the Hunter House had become a National Landmark and the Society had finally been deemed federal and state tax exempt after a long battle.³³⁹

One property acquired in 1968 was the Auton House at 100 Harrison Avenue (Illustration 21). This house was willed to the Preservation Society by Mary Latham G. Judge upon her death.

³³² Annual Meeting Minutes, June 16th, 1966.

³³³ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1967 number 28

³³⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1967.

³³⁵ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, August 1967 number 31.

³³⁶ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, August 1967 number 31.

³³⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 1968.

³³⁸ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, August 1968 number 35.

³³⁹ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1968 number 36.

The Society officially became its owner on April 19th 1968.³⁴⁰ The Auton house was built on land that was formerly home to the Penn Craig estate, which once housed the writer Edith Wharton and her family. The house at 100 Harrison Avenue has now been combined with the homes at 98 and 96 Harrison Avenue to create one estate.³⁴¹



*Illustration 21: Contemporary View of the Auton House 100 Harrison Ave
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019*

Chateau-Sur-Mer 1969-1970

Chateau-Sur-Mer, at 474 Bellevue Avenue, was added to the historic house collection of the Society in 1969 (Illustration 22). The Society's publication wrote this about the addition "The Preservation Society acquired Chateau-Sur-Mer, considered to be one of the finest examples of Victorian Architecture in America, thus taking another step towards its aim of preserving for future generations the various links which make up the history of this country's architecture."³⁴² Chateau-Sur-Mer was originally built in 1851 by architect Seth Bradford and

³⁴⁰ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Harrison House, 100 Harrison Avenue, Plat 41 Lot 10.4

³⁴¹ Newport Historical Society Library. Historic Property Data and Historic Atlases.

³⁴²*Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1969 number 40.

added to in 1872 by Richard Morris Hunt for William S. Wetmore.³⁴³ The last Wetmore to own the Chateau was Edith K. Wetmore, daughter of William S. Wetmore. On her death she deeded the property to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. It had been both her and her sister's request upon their deaths the building go to SPNEA; she died second activating the behest.³⁴⁴ Edith Wetmore died on March 10th, 1966. On May 22nd, 1967 the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities declined the gift of the estate.³⁴⁵ SPNEA was uninterested in the house because of its Victorian architecture which was at the time in history generally undervalued.³⁴⁶ It is not entirely clear why Ms. Wetmore decided to give the building to SPNEA. It not only made more geographic sense to give it to the Newport Society, but she was also the Newport Society's first president and their first meeting took place in that house. The Preservation Society also wanted the property and SPNEA did not. Regardless the building ended up with the Preservation Society in Newport.

The Preservation Society bought the property, which was officially split into four parts. The first three parts were purchased on December 31st, 1969 and the last piece was acquired on February 10th, 1970.³⁴⁷ The pieces of Chateau-Sur-Mer cost the Society \$115,105.³⁴⁸ The money for the estate was raised within the Society. There were many donors for this project.³⁴⁹

The mansion was at risk of demolition and in its place several contemporary houses of the time could have been built. The rush to save it was successful because of the Society and their supporters, according to Warren it was "persons interested in this country's heritage."³⁵⁰ The house's location on Bellevue Ave made its acquisition particularly important as losing a

³⁴³ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1969 number 40.

³⁴⁴ Newport Deeds Office, Probate Records, Edith Wetmore, Chateau-Sur-Mer. Book 140 Page 539-540.

³⁴⁵ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Chateau-Sur-Mer, 474 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 36 Lot 33.

³⁴⁶ Clive Aslet, CHATEAU-SUR-MER, NEWPORT, USA: A Property of the Preservation Society of Newport County, *Country Life (Archive : 1901 - 2005)*, Dec 25, 1986, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/docview/1513108186?accountid=10267>.

³⁴⁷ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Chateau-Sur-Mer, 474 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 36 Lot 33.

³⁴⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Chateau-Sur-Mer 474 Bellevue Ave, December 31st, 1969 and February 10th 1970, Book 228 page 489-495 and Book 229 Page 25-26.

³⁴⁹ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1969 number 40.

³⁵⁰ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1969 number 40.

house on the historic Avenue and replacing it with multiple houses that did not fit in would have marred the historic landscape.³⁵¹

About 5 acres of the Chateau-Sur-Mer property sold to Salve Regina College, upon the Society's purchase of the land. This included the Carriage House of Chateau-Sur-Mer which bordered property already owned by Salve Regina (Illustration 23).³⁵² The sale did not officially "go through" until February 10th, 1970, though it was discussed in the 1969 reports. The property was bought by Salve Regina for \$29,265.³⁵³ The College stewards over 20 historic buildings in Newport which they have repurposed to be used as campus buildings while still maintaining their historic integrity.³⁵⁴ It makes sense then that the Society would trust them with one of their historic properties, freeing up their resources while still protecting the historic property.

While it was acknowledged that this property was a great save for the Society and was particularly important for their mission, the organization saw challenges ahead. At the 1969 Annual Meeting Warren said this,

I believe most sincerely that Newport is verily at a crossroads at this moment, and that it can, with proper direction become all that we can hope for in our wildest dreams, or it can fall into a sad decay and become just one more of the growing blots on our American Landscape.³⁵⁵

Warren was expressing the need for continual growth of the Society and preservation throughout the community.

There were two other property transactions in 1970. First, 31 Walnut Street was sold to the Newport Restoration Foundation for \$7,000 on June 8th, 1970.³⁵⁶ On July 7th, 1970 the Preservation Society bought 16 Farwell St from the Newport Restoration Foundation. They paid \$12,000 for this piece of land that would become the parking lot for the White Horse Tavern.³⁵⁷

³⁵¹ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1969 number 40.

³⁵² *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1969 number 40.

³⁵³ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Chateau-Sur-Mer Carriage House 474 Bellevue Ave, February 10th, 1970, book 229 page 28.

³⁵⁴ Salve Regina University. *Campus Buildings* Accessed May 28, 2019. <https://salve.edu/campus-buildings>.

³⁵⁵ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1969.

³⁵⁶ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 31 Walnut Street, August 28th, 1970, Book 230 Page 214.

³⁵⁷ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, White Horse Tavern Parking Lot 16 Farwell Street, Book 230 Page 237.

At the 1969 Annual Meeting Warren expressed her belief that the Society had added 15 million dollars to the local economy since their founding. This number was calculated by multiplying the 1.5 million visitors and averaging that each visitor had spent at least \$10 in town.³⁵⁸

The White Horse Tavern was also finally granted a liquor license after a new state law was passed called the Historic Tavern Act, this law made historic taverns eligible to get liquor licenses even if they were in close proximity to religious houses of worship. The Rhode Island Supreme Court decided that the Society should be officially tax exempt and refunds were paid back on all the previous taxes contributed to the state.³⁵⁹ The improved cash flow made Chateau-Sur-Mer easier to afford. The year 1970 saw the official opening of Chateau-Sur-Mer and an overall decrease in attendance by 4%. Unfortunately, 1970 was also the year of the devastating Breakers Stable fire, which destroyed the roof and many irreplaceable artifacts within.³⁶⁰

The property 100 Harrison, also known as the Auton house, was quickly sold as the Society could not afford the property at the time of its bequest to them and was in great need of additional funding.³⁶¹ On October 16th, 1969 it was decided that the Auton house would be sold to Olivia Antoinette Griscom for \$85,00 in a board vote.³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1969.

³⁵⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1969.

³⁶⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 18th, 1970.

³⁶¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 27th, 1985.

³⁶² Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 100 Harrison Street, February 1st, 1965, Book 228 Page 512.



Illustration 22: Contemporary View of the Chateau-Sur-Mer
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 23: Contemporary View of the Chateau-Sur-Mer Carriage House
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

The Breakers 1971-1972

The Breakers Stables were able to partially reopen in 1971. They were again able to sell tickets to the site that had to be closed previously due to fire. The Society also continued repairs on the Brick Market, which they were still subletting.³⁶³ The organization also led the charge on the restoration of the famed Newport Cliff walk, which passes around many of their estates.³⁶⁴

The year 1971 had one new real estate edition, which was the Rosecliff estate (Illustration 24). The house was designed by McKim, Mead, and White for Herman Oelrichs from 1901 to 1902. The estate was a donation to the Society by Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Monroe of New Orleans, who had purchased the property from Mrs. Ray Alan Van Cleif in 1947.³⁶⁵ Rosecliff was also given a \$300,000 endowment, which supplied the Society with \$22,750 for

³⁶³ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, February 1971 number 45.

³⁶⁴ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, February 1972 number 49.

³⁶⁵ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, Summer 1971 number 47.

maintenance on the property each year.³⁶⁶ This was a first for the Society, who had an endowment on Rovensky Park, but this was the first estate they were given that also came with an endowment for its maintenance.³⁶⁷

In 1972 the Preservation Society paid \$3,500 for a piece of the Project Area known as the Goat Island Urban Renewal Project. This area would later become known as Storer Park (Illustration 25).³⁶⁸ They put a \$350 deposit on the property on May 8th 1972³⁶⁹ and bought it outright on August 15, 1972.³⁷⁰

The year 1972 was also when the Preservation Society completed the purchase of what is now perhaps their most iconic property, The Breakers. Countess Gladys Szecheni died in 1965, prior to her death the Society had been leasing the property for \$1.00 a year and accepted responsibility for some of the maintenance and upkeep of the property. When she died she willed the property to her four daughters Gladys Peterson, Sylvia Szapary, Alice Hadik, and Nandine Eltz, her two granddaughters Gladys Roberts Thomas and Cornelia Roberts and her grandson Eugene B. Roberts Jr. The Preservation Society continued the \$1 lease agreement, after the Countess' death until 1972 and had been paying all of the financial burdens of the property.³⁷¹ The sale was conditioned by a provision that, should the Preservation Society decide to sell the property within ten years of its purchase they must first offer the property back to who formerly owned it, then they would have 30 days to decide if they wanted to buy the property back. The cost of the Breakers was \$366,475.³⁷² The furniture was not acquired along with the sales price of the house, however over the years descendants of the Countess have returned much of it to the Preservation Society.³⁷³ The Breakers had always been the property that drew the most visitors to

³⁶⁶ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1972 number 50.

³⁶⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 29th, 1972.

³⁶⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Goat Island, Book 236 page 270.

³⁶⁹ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Goat Island, Book 235 page 255.

³⁷⁰ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Goat Island, Book 236 page 270.

³⁷¹ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. The Breakers, 44 Ochre Point, Plat 36 Lot 59.

³⁷² Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, The Breakers 44 Ochre Point, December 20th, 1972, Book 237 Page 377.

³⁷³Enid Nemy, "Countess Szapary, 79; Led Newport Society," *New York Times*, March 3, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/03/us/countess-szapary-79-led-newport-society.html>.

Newport and with this purchase the Society guaranteed this guest attraction for as long as they could afford to keep the property running. The Society also officially purchased the Breakers Stables and Carriage House at 53 Cogeshall Avenue, which the organization managed for many years prior. This was part of the same deal as The Breakers, so the same restrictions applied to these properties as well.³⁷⁴

Kingscote was given to the Society upon the death of Gwendolen Ella Rives on October 23rd, 1972 (Illustration 26).³⁷⁵ The house was built in 1839 by famed architect Richard Upjohn.³⁷⁶ The cottage was added onto in 1881 and 1882 by McKim, Mead, and White. It is Gothic Revival styled structure a “cottage orne.”³⁷⁷ With the donation of the property Rives also willed to the Society a sizable endowment meant to cover expenses for the “betterment” of the site. The house was seen as a historical link between the Hunter House of the Colonial Era and the Gilded Age mansions of Bellevue Ave. Along with the house came period furniture described as from the “days of the China trade.”³⁷⁸ Despite several offers on the house Rive’s mother bequeathed the house to her daughter Gwendolen in the hope that she would preserve it and she did so by giving the house to the Preservation Society upon her death.³⁷⁹

In the February 1973 edition of the *Newport Gazette* the first page was dedicated to the death of Alice Brayton, who passed on December 11th, 1972. She was 94 at the time of her death. She was a member of the Preservation Society from its beginning and donated her time, skills, and money to the Society’s endeavors. Noted in her obituary are her gardens, Green Animals, “Miss Brayton’s own gardens were internationally known in the horticultural world and were frequently described in major national publications.”³⁸⁰ Green Animals is a topiary garden which is famous for shaping its plants into animals and geometric figures (Illustration 27). When

³⁷⁴ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, The Breakers 44 Ochre Point, December 20th, 1972, Book 237 Page 377.

³⁷⁵ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Kingscote, 253 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 28 Lot 114.

³⁷⁶ Ferguson, *Kingscote: Cottage Orne*, 1.

³⁷⁷ Ferguson, *Kingscote: Cottage Orne*, 29.

³⁷⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 1973.

³⁷⁹ J. Walton Ferguson, *Kingscote: Cottage Orne*, (Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1977), 28-29.

³⁸⁰ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, February 1973 number 53.

Alice's father passed away the property was given to her and her brother. She bought out her brother's interest in the property and took control of it making it into her primary residence.³⁸¹ When she died in 1972, she willed the estate to the Preservation Society with the understanding that the gardens would be maintained. To honor her passing her brother Edward Brayton and nephew Thomas Marvell gifted the Preservation Society money for upkeep of the garden for the first three years that the Society owned it.³⁸²

In the 1972 Annual Meeting record a list was published called "Properties which we have acquired, or which have been operated under our auspices." The list includes: 1946 Hunter House, 1947 Pitts Head Tavern, 1948 Breakers, 1949 Breakers Stables, 1949 Wanton, Lyman Hazard House, 1953 Arnold Burying Ground, 1953 White Horse Tavern, 1957 Lucas House, 1958 Brick Market, 1959 Rovensky Park, 1961 Rogers House, 1962 The Elms, 1963 Marble house, 1967 Mathew Galbraith Perry House, 1969 Chateau-Sur-Mer, 1971 Rosecliff, 1972 Kingscote, 1972 Green Animals.³⁸³ Other properties which the Society had owned were notably missing from this list including: 100 Harrison, 30 Thames, and others. The list was a list of all the properties that the Society felt associated with so why they chose to exclude some of their less notable properties, while including houses which they never owned but helped to preserve, is unknown but does show the public force of the organization.

³⁸¹ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1973 number 54.

³⁸² Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 1973.

³⁸³ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 29th, 1972.



Illustration 24: Contemporary View of Rosecliff
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 25: Contemporary View of the Storer Park
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 26: Contemporary View of Kingscote
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019



Illustration 27: Contemporary View of the Green Animals
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

Rosecliff 1973-1975

The Preservation Society sold Storer Park to the City of Newport on August 28th, 1973.³⁸⁴ The property was given with the restriction that it only ever be used as a park.³⁸⁵ This was part of the Goat Island Urban Renewal Project, and the Preservation Society would hold easements on the properties for years to come.

In 1974 J. Edgar Monroe, who had previously gifted the Rosecliff property, gave the Society the adjacent land formerly the property of the By-the-Sea Estate, part of which they had given during the 1971 gift of Rosecliff. This new piece completed the giving of the By-The -Sea estate to the Preservation Society.³⁸⁶ The donated land was approximately 14 acres.³⁸⁷ By-the-Sea was once a mansion on Bellevue Avenue as grand as many of the others. The cottage was designed for August Belmont and his wife in 1861 by architect George Mason. Its ornate character was written about in many papers and publications. In 1942 the building was taken over by the City because of unpaid taxes. In 1945 Mr. Van Clierf combined the property with the adjacent Rosecliff, which he also owned creating one large property. On January 28th, 1946 he was given permission by the building inspector to tear it down.³⁸⁸ By-the-Sea was lost, but because of its combination with Rosecliff it went to Monroe when he purchased the property and he was therefore able to donate it to the Preservation Society.

In 1974 and 1975 Chateau-Sur-Mer was being partially used as a toy museum and Rosecliff was being to film Great Gatsby movie. The film was great publicity for the Society and it boosted the local economy.³⁸⁹

In 1975 the Society noted in their Annual Report “This year the Society had not taken on any more houses.”³⁹⁰ Warren stated this showing that there had been so much acquiring of new

³⁸⁴ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Storer Park, Washington Street, Plat 16 Lot 236.

³⁸⁵ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Storer Park, Book 239 Page 434.

³⁸⁶ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. By-the-Sea, 548 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 37 Lot 1.

³⁸⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1975.

³⁸⁸ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, February 1975 number 61.

³⁸⁹ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, February 1974 number 57.

³⁹⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1975.

properties prior to this that it was worth noting that in this particular year there was none. Warren also noted that the Society had played a large part in the local and state economy stating, “State economic development officials deem the Society’s properties the leading state generator of tourism.”³⁹¹ This was Warren’s last year as president of the Preservation Society.³⁹²

Extreme Expenses 1976

By contrast, the 1976 Annual Report notes the addition of parking lots due to enraged locals who were not fans of the traffic produced by incoming visitors on the Preservation Society’s properties. Much of the visitor parking had been on the streets near the historic properties. The Breakers, Marble House and the Elms had already acquired land around their properties in previous years, which would be made into parking lots to solve this issue. The land around the Hunter House, including Storer Park, was being used as a public park at the time the organization could not create a parking lot for that house, having been previously “given away” by the Society.³⁹³ The May 1976 Newport Gazette also has an obituary for Katherine Warren who had been so instrumental in the creation of the institution.³⁹⁴

Speaking at the 1976 Annual Meeting the new President, Mrs. Stuart H. Ingersoll, spoke about the costs the Preservation Society was incurring. She notes that they were stewarding 10 houses and one park.

I know the expenses seem horrendous, but we must remember we keep up ten houses and one park open to the public. Practically all the houses are surrounded by acres of lawns. If we do not keep all these houses and grounds in an approximation of their former grandeur no one would come to see them. It takes a great deal of money and hard work to keep these places running and in good condition.³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1975.

³⁹² Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1975.

³⁹³ *Annual Report*, Location in the Preservation Society of Newport County Archives at 424 Bellevue Avenue. 1975-1976.

³⁹⁴ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1976 number 66.

³⁹⁵ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1976.

Expenses reported in the Annual Report amounted to \$847,945.³⁹⁶ This number, along with the explanation, showed that the Society's support for the buildings raised concerns about their maintenance and appearance.

At the end of 1976 the Preservation Society sought to alleviate some of the expenses by selling a large part of By-the-Sea, for \$175,000. The property was sold to John W. Handel, Paul C. Harold Jr., and Peta Paul Handel. The deal was voted on and approved by the board on November 26th, 1976.³⁹⁷ On December 7th, 1976 the property was sold with the following rules being placed on it through an easement: the lot could never be divided more than four times, only single family homes were allowed to be built there, and that the height of the new buildings would not impede the view from its neighbor Rosecliff.³⁹⁸ The same person who donated Rosecliff donated the land and the Society decided that the best way to honor that gift was to add the \$175,000 from the sale to the original Rosecliff endowment.³⁹⁹

The President's Home 1977

In 1977 the Preservation Society decided not to renew their lease at the Brick Market.⁴⁰⁰ In May of same that year it was announced that the Society would move their headquarters to the former home of their recently departed President Katherine Warren at 118 Mill Street (Illustration 28).⁴⁰¹ The Society's previous headquarters had been first at Pitts Head Tavern, and then the Brick Market followed by the Rogers House. The house is named the Robert Lawton House after the owner who built the structure in 1808.⁴⁰² When Warren died in 1976, she gave the property to her sons, George Henry Warren Jr. and David Urquhart Warren, in equal shares.

³⁹⁶ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1976.

³⁹⁷ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, By the Sea 548 Bellevue Avenue, November 26th, 1976, Book 257 Page 1.

³⁹⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, By the Sea 548 Bellevue Avenue, November 18th, 1976, Book 257 Page 2.

³⁹⁹ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, February 1977 number 69.

⁴⁰⁰ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1977 number 70.

⁴⁰¹ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1977 number 70.

⁴⁰² *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1977 number 70.

On May 2nd, 1977 the Society took ownership of the property.⁴⁰³ When Warren bought the house it was considered to be in an unfashionable part of town.⁴⁰⁴ After Warren' death the Society paid \$85,000 for the property.⁴⁰⁵ The intention was to keep the property the same but to expand the parking lot.⁴⁰⁶

Because of the purchase of 118 Mill St. the Preservation Society no longer had a need for their former offices on 37 Touro Street, the Rogers House. A vote took place on November 25th, 1977 during which the board agreed that they would sell 37 Touro to Dr. Samuel V. Just for \$61,300, to use as his medical office. The deed was signed on November 30th, 1977.⁴⁰⁷ The house was originally bought with money donated in the memory of Charles P. Van Pelt, so when the house was sold, \$10,000 was set aside from the profit for a memorial for him. This was the original price of the house repairs. The amount the Diocese paid for the house was given back to the Diocese as well, returning the donation that they had made to purchase the original property.⁴⁰⁸ The White Horse Tavern closed once again in 1977 and was reopened on a new lease agreement.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰³ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Warren House, 118 Mill Street, Plat 25 Lot 84.

⁴⁰⁴ Alyssa Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, Newport: Commonwealth Editions, 2015, 27.

⁴⁰⁵ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 118 Mill Street Warren House, May 2nd, 1977, Book 263 Page 227-229.

⁴⁰⁶ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1977 number 70.

⁴⁰⁷ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 37 Touro Street, November 30th, 1977, Book 277 Page 105.

⁴⁰⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1978.

⁴⁰⁹ *Annual Report*, 1977-1978.



*Illustration 28: Contemporary View of 118 Mill Street
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019*

More Taxes and More Houses 1978-1979

In 1978 The Newport local government suggested the implementation of a 6% tax on admission to the museums. The Society strongly opposed the proposal for obvious reasons. They had ended the year with a loss of \$10,954. The Capital Fund balance at the end of the year was \$1,020,904, and after calculating in mortgage payments and budget repairs, they were down to \$550,000, which was still substantial.⁴¹⁰ Fortunately the tax on admission was defeated in 1979.⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1978.

⁴¹¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 1979.

The properties continued to face financial problems. The White Horse Tavern received new tenants again and the restaurant continued to be problematic for the Society. The Chinese Tea House on the Marble House property had to be moved back because it was no longer stable on its original site so close to the cliffs.⁴¹²

In 1979 the Society was willed \$1,250,000 upon the death of Mrs. Harold S. Vanderbilt, of which \$1,000,000 was added to the endowment already set up for the Marble House. The remaining \$250,000 was to be used however the Society saw best fit. Vanderbilt was the daughter-in-law to the original Vanderbilt owners of the Marble House estate.⁴¹³

The Malbone Hall Estate at 90 Malbone Rd was given to the Society after the death of Anita Stewart Morris (Illustration 29). The Hall was designed between 1848 and 1849 by Alexander Jackson Davis to look like “castellated ruins.” It was considered “behind its time” even when it was being built, but still a historically significant property.⁴¹⁴

Morris was given the property in the will of Lewis G. Morris and in the same will it was declared that upon her death it would be given to Alletta Nathalie Morris Mcbean. When Anita died in 1977 Alletta decided to transfer the house to the Preservation Society. The Preservation Society officially gained control of the property on January 2nd, 1979.⁴¹⁵ When the Society received the property it had a previous covenant on it stating that the house could never be substantially altered or subdivided. It was known and agreed upon that the Society was accepting the building so that they could put further covenants on it and sell it.⁴¹⁶

Also, in 1979, a piece of Bellevue Court was sold to Arthur M Murphy and others by the Society. This land was formerly a part of the estate that no longer stands, Middle Court. It was part of the Breakers parking lot before its sale. The Society received \$9,500 from the purchase.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹² Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1978.

⁴¹³ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 1979.

⁴¹⁴ Downing, and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island, 1640-1915*, 123.

⁴¹⁵ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Malbone Estate, 90 Malbone Road, Plat 7 Lot 3.4.

⁴¹⁶ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 1979.

⁴¹⁷ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 7 Bellevue Court, May 31, 1979, Book 291 page 786.



*Illustration 29: Contemporary View of 90 Malbone Rd
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019*

Sales and Covenants 1980-1982

In 1980, soon after the donation of the Malbone Estate to the Society, the property was sold to a Mr. and Mrs. Thomas. Restrictions were placed on the house as part of the easement. First, the exterior materials were to be maintained and restored. Second, the new owner cannot add onto the house without permission of the Society. Third, the premises may only be used as a single family home. The building also cannot be subdivided, trash must not be allowed to collect in the view of onlookers of the property, the grounds have to be preserved and maintained and no changes to the landscape can be done without the permission of the Society. To make sure the property was being taken cared for properly, inspection could be conducted at the will of the

Society. The owners must uphold the agreements of the covenant and fix what the Society says needs to be fixed. The Society reserved the right to place a plaque on the property expressing its significance. The new owners had to accept that the covenants were binding and ran with the property. The property was sold for \$385,500.⁴¹⁸

In 1980 attendance went down for the year due to a rising heat index in the northeast. Visitation went up the next year by 13.2% and another 11.5% the following year.⁴¹⁹ There were no additional purchases or sales in 1980.

In 1981 the Preservation Society sold the White Horse Tavern after owning it for many years and making several attempts operate it as a Tavern.⁴²⁰ On August 18th, 1981 the deed to the tavern was transferred to Lee A. Smith, O.L. Pitts, Carl B. Anderson Jr., Thomas C. Blake and Willis McIntosh, partners of White Horse Tavern Realty Co. (a R.I. General Partnership).⁴²¹ The property was sold for \$215,409. The structure was sold with preservation restrictions. They were as follows: The exterior would be maintained and preserved to the same level it was during the date of the sale, both inside and out, no addition to the structure was permitted, the property could not be subdivided, the premises cannot be used as anything but a Tavern, and no trash may pile up in the view of the street. The Preservation Society would regularly inspect the building, and they have the right to sue if they found the new owners in violation. The Preservation Society maintained the right to have a plaque on the property stating its historic importance. The new buyers had to agree to all terms, these restrictions run with the land. The deed also stated that the Preservation Society has the right of first refusal on the property, when the owners want to sell the property, they must first offer it to the Society who has thirty days to accept or decline. This too runs with the land so any future buyer will also have to offer the property back to the Preservation Society upon refusal. Then if declined by the Society the owners must sell at that

⁴¹⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Malbone Hall 90 Malbone Road, January 2nd, 1979, Book 297 Page 26.

⁴¹⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1980 and June 18th, 1981.

⁴²⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1982.

⁴²¹ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. The White Horse Tavern, 26 Marlborough Street, Plat 17 Lot 154.

price or higher to another entity. The new owner must notify and make itself aware to the Society upon purchasing.⁴²²

The Society also sold the adjoining parking lot to the White Horse Tavern on Farwell Street to Lee A. Smith, O.L. Pitts, Carl B. Anderson Jr., Thomas C. Blake and Willis McIntosh, partners of White Horse Tavern Realty Co. (a R.I. General Partnership).⁴²³ This was done at the same time as the agreements regarding the White Horse Tavern Property so the same restrictions would apply and it was included in the cost.⁴²⁴

Learning What the Society Can and Cannot Handle 1983-1985

The 1982-1983 Annual Report publication itemized the properties: Hunter House, Warren House, Kingscote, Chateau-Sur-Mer, Green Animals, Marble House, The Breakers, The Elms, Rosecliff, Chinese Teahouse, Rovensky Park, and the Arnold Burying Ground.⁴²⁵ This list stays the same through the 1984-1985 Annual Report.⁴²⁶ What was missing in the catalogue of these buildings is the entry of Hopedene at 43 Cliff Ave, a 1902 Georgian Revival structure designed by Peabody and Sterns (Illustration 30).⁴²⁷ The Society was given the building upon the death of Charles C. Paterson. It was transferred to the Society on the last day of the year in 1982.⁴²⁸ Paterson, formerly the Vice President of the Society, had given the building so that the Society could sell it and profit from the sale. Originally, he had hoped that the Society would take the building and turn it into an inn, but the Society decided to sell it instead, and he agreed to the sale. They had learned from their restaurant endeavor not to enter into yet another business venture in which they did not have experience. All covenants were transferred to the Society

⁴²²Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, White Horse Tavern 26 Marlborough Street, August 18th, 1981, Book 304 Page 10.

⁴²³ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. White Horse Tavern Parking Lot Plat 17 Lot 245.

⁴²⁴ Deed book 304 page 10

⁴²⁵ *Annual Report*, 1982-1983.

⁴²⁶ *Annual Report*, 1984-1985.

⁴²⁷ National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, *Ochre Point-Cliffs Historic District*, July 1969, http://www.preservation.ri.gov/pdfs_zips_downloads/national_pdfs/newport/newp_ochre-point-cliffs-hd.pdf.

⁴²⁸ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Hopedene, 43 Cliff Avenue, Plat 34 Lot 1.2.

upon his death as well.⁴²⁹ The Society sold Hopedene on October 14, 1983 to Charles T. Cudlip for \$385,000.⁴³⁰ The estate was last valued at \$14,011,100 in 2018.⁴³¹



Illustration 30: Contemporary View of Hopedene
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

Publicizing What They Owned 1986-1990

In the 1986 Annual Meeting the Society listed the following as houses and property that they owned: Hunter House, Kingscote, Chateau-Sur-Mer, Green Animals, Marble House, The Breakers, The Elms, Rosecliff, the Breakers Stables, The Breakers green house, the Chinese Tea House, Rovensky park, Arnold Burying Ground, and the Warren House.⁴³² The 1986 Annual

⁴²⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 27th, 1985.

⁴³⁰Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Hopedene 43 Cliff Avenue, October 14th, 1983, Book 317 Page 115.

⁴³¹Newport, RI, *Vision Government Solutions*, 43 Cliff Avenue, <http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?PId=6284>.

⁴³² Annual Meeting Minutes, June 26th, 1986.

Meeting report emphasized the buildings the Society owned and occupied before these were listed as “has owned or occupied the following buildings and eventually returning them to the city tax rolls: White Horse Tavern, Perry House, Pitts Head Tavern, Auton House, Rogers House, Hopedene, Malbone, and the empty lot where the August Belmont house stood, ‘By-the-Sea.’”⁴³³ The report later goes on to site that the Society has aided in the preservation of the August Lucas House, the Wilbur Farm, Vernon House, Arnold Park, Storer Park, and the Brick Market.⁴³⁴ Here they do not claim to have owned the Lucas House, a claim they have made in previous Annual Reports nor do they speak of the two houses that were supposed to have been around the White Horse Tavern or the other building on 52 Washington that had been mentioned in the 1953 publishing but not in any deeds. This further proved that they did not ever own these sites. Also noteworthy was the mention of adding property back onto tax rolls, which they clearly saw as an incentive to the town that had criticized them for owning so much property that had become tax exempt. Another way they were supplementing the economy was to add to property, adding value to it, and putting it back into the city tax rolls. This additive was good advertising aimed towards their critics.

In 1990 the major addition to the Society’s holdings were the properties at 7 Murray Place. The purchase combined three plots of land: specifically, lots 48, 96, and 97 of Plat 37.⁴³⁵ This property would forwardly be known as the Green Houses-Hill property, which holds the green houses for the organization.⁴³⁶ This acquisition went through on June 13th, 1990.⁴³⁷ The acquisition most likely drew on the Van Beuren Fund.

For the remainder of the 1980s up through 1990 there were no other major acquisitions.⁴³⁸ In the 1988 through 1989 Annual Report the following properties were listed as

⁴³³ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 26th, 1986.

⁴³⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 26th, 1986.

⁴³⁵ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Green House-Hill Property 7 Murray Place, Plat 37 Lots 48, 96, 97.

⁴³⁶ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Green House-Hill Property 7 Murray Place, Plat 37 Lots 48, 96, 97.

⁴³⁷ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Green House-Hill Property 7 Murray Place, Plat 37 Lots 48, 96, 97.

⁴³⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 1990.

having major work done on them: The Breakers, The Elms, Rosecliff, Chateau-Sur-Mer, Marble House, Kingscote, Warren House, and Chepstow. Interestingly Chepstow was included in this list but not in the list in the same Annual Report of all of their properties.⁴³⁹ This is because the Preservation Society would not own Chepstow until 1997.⁴⁴⁰ Clearly the Society made their interest in the property known before it was acquired. Assisting in the repairs of the property was a way to illustrate a commitment before finalizing the title transfer.

The earliest audit that the Preservation Society retains is from fiscal year 1986 comparing its numbers from fiscal year 1985. In 1985 the value of their real estate furnishings was equal to \$1,267,344.47. In 1986 it was \$1,266,113.44. These numbers included equipment and vehicles, when those items are taken out of this calculation the evaluation for Hunter House, The Elms, Marble House, Chateau-Sur-Mer, Green Animals, the Breakers, Rosecliff, Kingscote, Rovensky Park, and 118 Mill Street (Warren House) were the same value at \$1,162,133.65 each year.⁴⁴¹ The next available audit from the Preservation Society was not until 1991.

New Offices at Osgood-Pell 1991-1992

Fiscal year 1991 came and went with no significant purchases or sales. The Society decided that it needed to rent out their properties more for events as they were not making enough on admissions.⁴⁴² This could partly explain the lessened frequency of buying that happens after these years.

On November 14th, 1991 the Preservation Society purchased the Osgood-Pell House at 424 Bellevue Ave (Illustration 31).⁴⁴³ The house was built in 1887 in the Romanesque style for William Osgood.⁴⁴⁴ The property was purchased from the city. Originally it was a private

⁴³⁹ *Annual Report, 1988-1989.*

⁴⁴⁰ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Chepstow, 120 Narraganset Avenue, Plat 34 Lot 53.

⁴⁴¹ Hoff, Raiche, Koziara, and Martland. 1986 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County. June 23rd, 1986.

⁴⁴² Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 1991.

⁴⁴³ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. 424 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 36 Lot 71.

⁴⁴⁴National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, *Bellevue Avenue Historic District*, 1970, <http://www.cityofnewport.com/home/showdocument?id=7244>, 187.

residence but later was converted into a school.⁴⁴⁵ The money to purchase this house, that would eventually serve as the Society's new headquarters, was given by the Aletta Morris McBean Charitable Trust in memory of Aletta Morris McBean who had once been a trustee of the Society. This is the same woman who had owned the Malbone house before her daughter donated it to the Society. The amount to buy the Osgood-Pell house was \$1.1 million.⁴⁴⁶ Also in this year the Society had noticed the trend of people coming to Newport and visiting only the Breakers and then leaving without visiting any of the other houses. The next year the organization focused on bringing more people to the other houses after they had visited the Breakers.⁴⁴⁷ The house at 424 Bellevue was added to the list of properties that the Society owned and it brought the number up to 14 properties, this did not include properties owned as parking lots or other buildings that were donated to be sold.⁴⁴⁸

The years 1991 and 1992 were the first years that the Society has comprehensive records of visitors broken down by houses, individuals, groups and how many were members of the organization. The attendance years were recorded based on calendar year, not on the same schedule as the fiscal year. For these two years the Breakers Stable was the lowest attended and the Breakers was the highest attended site. In 1991 there were a total of 735,673 visitors, and a 77,421 change in visitors overall in 1992 there was a total of 813,094 visitors. That was a 10.5% increase in visitation overall.⁴⁴⁹

The audit from 1991, which compared real estate investments in 1990 and 1991, showed in 1990 that the value of properties held by the organization was \$1,162,128.65. In 1991 the property value rose to 1,777,928.65. This was due to the acquisition of the Greenhouses-Hill Property that was not added into the 1990 Audit.⁴⁵⁰ The 1992 value of property rises significantly

⁴⁴⁵ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. 424 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 36 Lot 71.

⁴⁴⁶ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 1991.

⁴⁴⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 1991.

⁴⁴⁸ *Annual Report*, 1991-1992.

⁴⁴⁹ *Attendance sheet for the Preservation Society of Newport County, 1991-1992*.

⁴⁵⁰ Hoff, Raiche, Koziara, and Martland, 1991 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, June 14, 1991, Exhibit J.

to \$2,795,758. This was due to the acquisition of the Pell building, which was individually valued at \$1,017,825, almost as much as all the other buildings together prior.⁴⁵¹ Within both of these evaluations Rosecliff and Kingscote were valued at \$1.00 each because they were donated buildings. The Society only paid \$1.00 for them.⁴⁵² This shows that the numbers in the audits reflect in this era more of what the Society actually paid for the estates rather than what the properties were worth at sale.



Illustration 31: Contemporary View of the Osgood-Pell House
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

⁴⁵¹ Hoff, Raiche, Koziara, and Martland, LTD, 1992 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, June 9, 1992, 16.

⁴⁵² Hoff, Raiche, Koziara, and Martland. 1991 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County. June 14, 1991 and 1992 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, June 9, 1992.

Move to More Space 1993-1994

In 1993 the Society added no new properties. Attendance statistics showed that 44% of the visitors to any location of the Society had gone through either the Breakers or the Breakers Stables.⁴⁵³ This demonstrated that the Breakers was still their most popular site, but also that the other houses were finally attracting visitors separate from the Breakers. The attendance for that year was up 6%.⁴⁵⁴ In the Annual Report for 1993-1994 the properties listed were the Arnold Burying Ground, Hunter House, Kingscote, Chateau-Sur-Mer, Green Animals, 424 Bellevue Avenue, Marble House, The Breakers, The Breakers Stable, The Elms, Rosecliff, Chinese Teahouse (part of Marble House), and Rovensky Park.⁴⁵⁵ The Greenhouse-Hill Property was not mentioned nor was it ever itemized amongst these properties perhaps because it is a venue for behind the scenes work not for visitors, though the same could be said for 424 Bellevue which served as the Society's offices and was not available for touring.

The next year 1994 brought the addition of one new property to the Society. This was a warehouse at 215 Third Street (Illustration 32). For this building the Society created a second organization called PSNC, which was a 501(c) 2 corporation. They started the second organization under the Society's umbrella because this new corporation was taxable, showing the awareness of owning untaxed land and the willingness to pay taxes for buildings that were being used for unhistorical purposes. This building, which was 40 years old when purchased, would be used as a new storage facility. Prior to this the basement of the Breakers provided for the storage needs of the organization. Plans arose to add a mill, masonry, and paint shop so that additional space in the Breakers Stables could be reallocated.⁴⁵⁶ The warehouse was purchased on February 18th, 1994 at the cost of \$190,000.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵³Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1993.

⁴⁵⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1993.

⁴⁵⁵ *Annual Report*, 1993-1994.

⁴⁵⁶ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 16th, 1994.

⁴⁵⁷ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. 215 Third Street, Plat 9 Lot 414.

Also in 1994 the renovations at 424 Bellevue were completed and the Society was able to move into the space. This would be the Society's fifth office space going from Pitts Head Tavern, to the Brick Market, to Rogers House, to the Warren House, and now to their final destination.⁴⁵⁸ Due to the renovations being done, the Society sold their old headquarters at 118 Mill Street, home of their former president Katherine Warren. It was sold on January 28th, 1994 for \$420,000.⁴⁵⁹ The house was returned to its original purpose as a single family home and was in 2018 valued at \$2,542,1000.⁴⁶⁰



Illustration 32: Contemporary View of the Warehouse at 215 Third Street
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

The Fiftieth Anniversary Year 1995

The fiftieth anniversary of the Society occurred in 1995 and, to celebrate in their 1994-1995 Annual Report they published a story about the Society. A major part of that narrative was about the houses they had purchased and the history behind their estates. This is a selected

⁴⁵⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 16th, 1994.

⁴⁵⁹ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Warren House, 118 Mill Street, Plat 25 Lot 84.

⁴⁶⁰ Newport, RI, *Vision Government Solutions*, 118 Mill Street. <http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=4891>.

history. Houses which were given to the Society or that the Society had bought and sold were not included, nor were some properties that were still owned, including the warehouse and the Greenhouse property.⁴⁶¹ This added emphasis to the idea that some of their properties, served primarily as investments and they were seen as a part of the financial history, not the house history or public history.

On August 25th, 1994 the Preservation Society purchased the Isaac Bell house at 70 Perry Street for \$480,000 (Illustration 37).⁴⁶² The structure was purchased through a two year interest free loan from a trustee of the Society. There was also a \$50,000 donation made from the Alletta Morris McBean Charitable Trust specifically for the house's benefit that went towards a historic structures report on the property. Isaac Bell, the original inhabitant of the home, was a cotton broker and investor who had the home built in 1883.⁴⁶³ The house was a shingle style design by McKim, Mead, and White. The Society first went into the project aiming to save it and have a private buyer take the house over. After the historic structure report it was decided that the house would fit into their existing collection and add to the houses the Society already owned.⁴⁶⁴ On January 1st, 1995 the Preservation Society transferred the property to their 501 (c) 2 organization PSNC specifically so that the property would be taxed until they could open it as a historic site to the public.⁴⁶⁵ This again showed the awareness of the Society in dealing with tax issues.

The property value the Society owned according to the March 31st, 1995 tax audit was \$5,643,149. The properties included in this evaluation were Hunter House, the Elms, Marble House, Chateau-Sur-Mer, Green Animals, Breakers, Rosecliff, Kingscote, Greenhouses-Hill Property, Rovensky Memorial Park, 424 Bellevue, Warehouse, Isaac Bell House, and the

⁴⁶¹ Annual Report, 1994-1995.

⁴⁶² Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Isaac Bell House, 70 Perry Street, Plat 33 Lot 25.

⁴⁶³ The Preservation Society of Newport County, *Isaac Bell House*, Accessed January 20, 2019, <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/isaac-bell-house>.

⁴⁶⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1995.

⁴⁶⁵ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1995.

Breakers Parking lot.⁴⁶⁶ Properties from both the Preservation Society 501 (c) 3 and the PSNC 501 (c) 2 were included in the same list in this audit.



*Illustration 33: Contemporary View of Isaac Bell
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019*

The Last Additions 1996-1997

In 1996 and 1997 the Society worked hard to raise money for the Isaac Bell House's restoration and interpretation. As of March 31st, 1996, they had raised \$1,346,00 in cash donations and \$373,000 in pledges, making for a total of \$1,719,000. The Alletta Morris McBean Foundation contributed \$1,100,000 in cash to the property, \$600,000 of which was in the form of a challenge to match grant. Admission income for the year was also up \$293,000

⁴⁶⁶ Hoff, Raiche, Koziara, and Martlan, LTD, 1995 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, June 12, 1995, 20.

from the previous year. At the Annual Meeting the treasurer said “In short we had a very good year.”⁴⁶⁷

At the next Annual Meeting on June 19th, 1997 it was reported that \$1.2 million had been raised from foundations specifically for the house. This included the McBean matching grant of \$600,00, \$100,000 from the Prince Foundation, \$200,000 from the Van Beuren Foundation, and \$300,000 from the Kresge Foundation. Together \$1.6 million had been spent on the house so far.⁴⁶⁸ It was also in 1997 that the Society transferred the Isaac Bell House to the 501 (C) 3 foundation, making the house tax exempt on December 5th, 1997.⁴⁶⁹

On December 19th, 1997, the Society acquired another estate, Chepstow (Illustration 34). This was the former home of Alleta McBean, the creator of the trust that the Society had gained so much from, and who had funded part of the Isaac Bell restoration, along with much other support to the organization.⁴⁷⁰ Chepstow was designed by local architect George Champlin Mason in 1860. The original owner was Edmund Schermerhorn. Emily Morris Gallation bought the estate in 1911, and it remained in the Morris family from then until the Preservation Society became its official owners in 1997.⁴⁷¹ The Mcbean Foundation gave an \$800,000 permanent endowment for Chepstow.⁴⁷² Peter Mcbean, the last owner of Chepstow, willed that upon his death after the payment of estate taxes the property was to be transferred to the Preservation Society and run, as a house museum open to the public. The deed at the time of its transfer valued the estate at \$2,697,019.21. Chepstow was valued at \$1,387,100 and the contents within were worth \$286,330.00. The Society was also transferred stocks and personal property in the form of art.⁴⁷³

⁴⁶⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 1996.

⁴⁶⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1997.

⁴⁶⁹ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Isaac Bell House, 70 Perry Street, Plat 33 Lot 25.

⁴⁷⁰ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Chepstow, 120 Narraganset, Plat 34 Lot 53.

⁴⁷¹ The Preservation Society of Newport County. *Chepstow*. Accessed January 20, 2019. <https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/chepstow>.

⁴⁷² Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1997.

⁴⁷³ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Chepstow, December 19th, 1997, Book 788 Page 463.

In the 1996 audit, land and buildings of the Society were valued at \$4,031,542.⁴⁷⁴ The same was true in the 1997 audit because the fiscal year ends on March 31st so the Chepstow property was not included in this calculation.⁴⁷⁵ Land and buildings went up to \$4,209,789 in the next audit after the addition of Chesptow.⁴⁷⁶

The year 1997 marked the last of the large acquisitions to the Preservation Society, they would not add any more house museums to their collection. Chepstow was their last acquisition making them responsible for eleven public historic houses which are open to the public throughout Rhode Island, one park, one historic graveyard, and their historic office spaces. There were a few transactions that took place after, but they were smaller and for either investment or donation purposes, not for the creation of more museums or the addition of office space. What follows, for the remainder of this chapter, will be relevant economic facts about the Society and their various properties along with the mention of any other small transactions in the years up until the end of fiscal year 2018. It should also be noted that the value of property and buildings listed below was based on their non-profit status, if it were solely real estate value it would be much higher than what was listed in the audits.

⁴⁷⁴ Hoff, Raiche, Koziara, and Martlan, LTD, 1996 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, June 14, 1996, 12.

⁴⁷⁵ Hoff, Raiche, Koziara, and Martlan, LTD, 1997 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, June 24, 1997.

⁴⁷⁶ Hoff, Raiche, Koziara, and Martlan, LTD, 1998 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, June 18, 1998.



Illustration 34: Contemporary View of Chepstow
Source: Hannah Miller, 2019

Restoring Buildings and Building the Organization 1998-1999

The remainder of the century saw the restoration of Chepstow and the Isaac Bell House. Statues at the Elms were being restored and the Society was receiving new funds and endowments. The McBean Trust provided funds for Chepstow and Annie Laurie Aitken supported the Elms Coustou statue restoration efforts. The Society had grown in 1998 to having a 75-person full time staff and 335-member part time staff. The disappointing news in 1998 was the evaluation that showed that 3 million people were visiting Newport every year but only

around 1 million of those people were visiting the estates. The Society hoped to increase these numbers, especially at the Elms and Chateau-Sur-Mer.⁴⁷⁷

At the 1999 Annual Meeting Jerry Slocum, then President of the Board, had this to say about the houses they had collected: “We know that a significant number of the houses are never going to cover their operating costs.”⁴⁷⁸ This showed the realization that financially some of these structures, despite how they were received, were a financial burden to the Society. The importance of the houses was also reinforced at the same meeting when CEO Trudy Coxe said “We need to plan-no, maybe we need to shamelessly agitate-for ways that ensure that our reputation as the country’s foremost collection of historic houses is second to none.”⁴⁷⁹

In the 1998 fiscal year the land and buildings value was listed as \$4,209,789.⁴⁸⁰ The following years audit valued the property at \$4,268,612. There was a garage built on the Murray place property in 1998, which explains the addition in value from 1998 to 1999.⁴⁸¹ The full year of 1999 was described by CEO Trudy Coxe “1999 was the Society’s second-best year on record for attendance and the best year on record for visitation revenue.”⁴⁸²

Evolution of Stabilization 2000-2005

The fiscal year 2000 saw great economic strides for the organization. Revenue was up by \$1,000,000. But the Society started to realize the limitations of their endowments, even though they were getting many hundreds of thousands of dollars in unrestricted donations including \$350,000 from the Royal Oak Foundation and, another \$150,000 from the Annie Laurie Aitken Charitable Trust again for the Elms Gardens, \$100,000 donated in the will of George H. Parker for general use, and \$56,000 in the will of Benjamin C. Reed for any use. In 2000 the *Wall Street Journal* named the Preservation Society number 4 on the list of top New England tourist sites.

⁴⁷⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 18th, 1998.

⁴⁷⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1999.

⁴⁷⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1999.

⁴⁸⁰ Hoff, Raiche, Koziara, and Martlan, LTD, 1998 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, June 18, 1998.

⁴⁸¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1999.

⁴⁸² Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 2000.

Number 5 was not even close to the numbers that the Society had accomplished.⁴⁸³ Land and buildings were valued at \$4,619,591, in the 2000 funds restricted to building improvements were valued at \$1,538,132. There were three permanently restricted house funds: Marble House valued at \$4,991,075; Rovensky Park at \$673,614; and the Isaac Bell House at \$1,107,368. There were also the two permanent trusts: one at Rosecliff with a market value of \$1,171,040 and distributed income of \$24,500 and the other at Kingscote with a \$964,733 market value and \$20,200 distributed income.⁴⁸⁴

The value of land in 2001 stayed the same as the year prior at \$4,619,591.⁴⁸⁵ The Society received \$1.5 million in donations that year, half of which was restricted and half of which was not.⁴⁸⁶ The value of land and buildings went down slightly in 2002 to \$4,571,843.⁴⁸⁷ In 2002 the Society saw more visits to their houses from less people, meaning each individual visitor was seeing more houses than they had in previous years. It was at the same Annual Meeting that the Society discussed their desire to become an accredited museum institution. This was important to the museum's standing and reputation. CEO Trudy Coxe said about it "Accreditation will be our admission into the pantheon of the nation's most respected museums."⁴⁸⁸

In the 2003 fiscal year the Society raised \$2.1 million in charitable donations and \$340,000 in restricted funds, which was a 79% increase from the year before, and they secured \$543,000 in grants. The land and building value was \$4,588,676.⁴⁸⁹ There were 28,000 less visitors in 2003, which caused revenue from visitation to go down by \$200,000. This was attributed to a country wide recession. Foundation giving was up 17% from the previous year to \$543,000.⁴⁹⁰ The same challenges arose the next year. Again, the visitation numbers were down, this time by 9.3%, which equaled 822,000 visits. As the treasurer of the Society Pierre DuPont

⁴⁸³ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 2000.

⁴⁸⁴ Koziara, Martlan, and O'Reilly LTD, 2000 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, June 9, 2000.

⁴⁸⁵ Monti, CPA, 2001 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, May 23, 2001, 7.

⁴⁸⁶ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 2001.

⁴⁸⁷ Monti, CPA, 2002 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, May 21, 2002, 8.

⁴⁸⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 2002.

⁴⁸⁹ Monti, CPA, 2003 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, May 16, 2003.

⁴⁹⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 2003.

Irving said at the Annual Meeting “The last fiscal year ended March 31st, 2004 presented a continued fiscal challenge to the Preservation Society.”⁴⁹¹ The value of land and buildings stayed the same in 2004 at \$4,588,676.⁴⁹² Again in 2005 the visitation rate went down by 5.7%.⁴⁹³ The value of land and buildings in 2005 was \$4,685,440.⁴⁹⁴ It was an economically challenging year as the treasurer Pierre Dupont Irving said again at the Annual Meeting “the fiscal year ended March 31st, 2005 presented a continued financial challenge to the Preservation Society”.⁴⁹⁵

The Great Recession, Before, and After 2006-2010

The land and buildings in the 2006 audit were valued at \$7,291,008, significantly higher than the year before. The buildings had been reclassified and therefore the numbers changed drastically due to a revaluation of the value of properties.⁴⁹⁶ The land value in the 2007 audit was \$6,544,277. This was due to the price drop in the property market and the associated price decrease.⁴⁹⁷ At the 2006 Annual Meeting the new chairman Donald O. Ross discussed the financial challenges facing the Society:

Last year at this time my predecessor, Pierre Irving, now Chairman, indicated to you in his Report that Fiscal Year 2005 ‘presented a continued financial challenge to the Preservation Society.’ Well, over the 12 months of fiscal year 2006, we learned that our challenge was becoming even more difficult. Some of the same factors, such as declining museum attendance nationwide, impacted our results as well as our responses to these challenges. I will elaborate on these as I walk you through some of the numbers, but the important point is that despite these challenges, we maintained our houses in fine order and did not let our deferred maintenance grow.⁴⁹⁸

In the 2006-2007 Annual Report the Society had its support and revenue broken down into the following: 5.6% on Preservation Society events, 10.7% on property rental, 15.3% on

⁴⁹¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 2004.

⁴⁹² Monti, CPA, 2004 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, May 28, 2004, 14.

⁴⁹³ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 16th, 2005.

⁴⁹⁴ Monti, CPA, 2005 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, May 29, 2005, 15.

⁴⁹⁵ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 16th, 2005.

⁴⁹⁶ Monti, CPA, 2006 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, May 31, 2006.

⁴⁹⁷ Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2007 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, September 28, 2007.

⁴⁹⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 2006.

contributions, 18.9% on the mansion stores, 8.8% in endowment and 40.7% in admission.

Admission was by far the greatest revenue producer.⁴⁹⁹ The Annual Report noted, “Over the 12 months of fiscal 2007, we were faced with some of the same challenges we faced in fiscal 2006.”⁵⁰⁰ The Society remained solid, but financially strained.

At the 2008 Annual meeting the Society published its new official mission statement:

Great houses connect people to a nation’s heritage and open windows to another age. The Preservation Society of Newport County is a non-profit organization whose mission is to protect, preserve, and present an exceptional collection of house museums and landscapes in one of the most historically intact cities in America. We hold in public trust the Newport Mansions, which are an integral part of the living fabric of Newport, Rhode Island. These sites exemplify three centuries of the finest achievements in American architecture, decorative arts, and landscapes design spanning the Colonial era to the Gilded Age. Through our historic properties, educational programs, and related activities we engage the public in the story of America’s vibrant cultural heritage. We seek to inspire and promote an appreciation of the value of preservation to enrich the lives of people everywhere.⁵⁰¹

The board adopted this statement on March 28, 2008.⁵⁰² In the Annual Meeting minutes from 2008 it was noted that attendance was up and that the Society was more financially stable than the previous fiscal year, but challenges remained.⁵⁰³ Land and property were valued at \$6,688,379 for the 2008 fiscal year.⁵⁰⁴

In 2009 the value of land and property was \$6,678,106. The land was valued based on the price it would have been when it was donated or bought not in 2009 dollars.⁵⁰⁵ The year 2009 was not a financially outstanding year, but there was an increase in the surplus in budget as noted at the Annual Meeting by the treasurer:

It seems that every year has been a difficult one to see budgets through to the conclusion of a fiscal year and not worry about something, either the economy,

⁴⁹⁹ *Annual Report*, 2006-2007.

⁵⁰⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 14th, 2007.

⁵⁰¹ *Annual Report*, 2008.

⁵⁰² *Annual Report*, 2008.

⁵⁰³ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 12th, 2008.

⁵⁰⁴ Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2008 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, September 12, 2008.

⁵⁰⁵ Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2009 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, August 3, 2009, 6 and 13.

attendance, gasoline prices, arranging insurance or something else. This past year was no exception. I am pleased to report, however, that in the past fiscal year which ended March 31, we achieved a slight surplus of \$77,000.⁵⁰⁶

The 2010 land and buildings evaluation was \$6,742,092.⁵⁰⁷ The treasurer expressed his optimism about the Society's finances in the Annual Meeting:

I am happy to report that the Preservation Society had an excellent year from a financial point of view for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2010. These have been exceedingly difficult times in the museum world, and we seem to have made it through thus far in better shape than many of our peers. That being said, we certainly remain vigilant on the expense front, and are always looking at ways to enhance our financial condition.⁵⁰⁸

Revenue from the Recession 2011-2017

At the Annual Meeting in 2011 it was said by Monty Burnham, treasurer, "From a financial point of view, fiscal year ended March 31st, 2011 was a considerable success."⁵⁰⁹ In the 2011 Annual Report the CEO and Executive Director, Trudy Coxe, gave insight into the buying and selling practices of the Society's history. She said "Why did we buy and sell these houses? Because they mattered. But it wasn't just the buildings we were saving, it was the city's character."⁵¹⁰ The article describes some of the houses bought and sold. It mentions the two houses on the White Horse Tavern property whose ownership is questionable. It also mentions the purchase of the Lucas House even though there was no official evidence that the Society actually owned the house though they did play a large part in saving it regardless.⁵¹¹ The 2011 value of land and buildings was \$6,821,715 according to the 2011 audit.⁵¹²

The year 2012 had another good report from treasurer Monty Burnham "I'm happy to report that, while sluggish performance continued for several more months, when beautiful

⁵⁰⁶ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 11th, 2009.

⁵⁰⁷ Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2010 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, July 26, 2010.

⁵⁰⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 2010.

⁵⁰⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 16th, 2011.

⁵¹⁰ *Annual Report*, 2010-201, 8.

⁵¹¹ Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2011 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, August 16, 2011, 7.

⁵¹² Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2011 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, August 16, 2011, 10.

weather and signs of economic growth returned in the second half, the fiscal year ended March 31 ,2012 was another financial success.”⁵¹³ Admissions continued to be the largest revenue contributor at 42.1% of the revenue for the Society.⁵¹⁴ The land and buildings value for 2012 according to that years audit was \$6,852,576.⁵¹⁵ In 2013 the audited value of land and buildings was \$6,867,850.⁵¹⁶ 2013 was a major success financially the treasurer saying

The Preservation Society had a truly banner year in fiscal 2013! Operating revenues totaled \$19.38 million, 9 percent over budget, and nearly 12 percent over the prior fiscal year. We saw improvements in virtually every category. Against both budget for the year, and against the prior fiscal year, percentage improvements ranged from between single digits to significant double digits.⁵¹⁷

The calendar year of 2013 would see almost 1 million visitors, 923,644 to be exact.⁵¹⁸ The 2014 fiscal report from treasurer Monty Burnham said “I am pleased to report that the Preservation Society enjoyed another successful year financially in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2014. That said, it was not a blockbuster year like fiscal 2013. The numbers are healthy but modestly so.”⁵¹⁹ Visitors for the calendar year were 926,500.⁵²⁰ Land and buildings were valued at \$7,999,175 in the 2014 audited year having been reassessed from the previous year.⁵²¹ In the 2015 audit land and buildings were valued at \$8,395,708.⁵²² The year 2015 was the Society’s 70th anniversary and chairman Donald O. Ross had this to say, “As we celebrate our 70th anniversary, I am proud to tell you that the Preservation Society has never been healthier or more successful in fulfilling our mission to protect, preserve and present Newport’s amazing historic

⁵¹³ *Annual Report*, 2011-2012, 10.

⁵¹⁴ *Annual Report*, 2011-2012, 11.

⁵¹⁵ Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2012 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, August 30, 2012, 12.

⁵¹⁶ Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2013 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, November 18, 2013 12.

⁵¹⁷ *Annual Report*, 2012-2013, 10.

⁵¹⁸ *Attendance sheet for the Preservation Society of Newport County*, 2013.

⁵¹⁹ *Annual Report*, 2013-2014 10.

⁵²⁰ *Attendance sheet for the Preservation Society of Newport County*, 2014.

⁵²¹ Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2014 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, August 21, 2014.

⁵²² Kahn, Litwin, Renza, and Co., Ltd., 2015 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, August 20, 2015.

legacy.”⁵²³ Also in his report he stated that one of their strategic priorities was that “ We will elevate our investment in our historic landscapes, continue to improve our collections management, and enhance our conservation and security activities.”⁵²⁴ The treasurer’s report also noted another positive fiscal year.⁵²⁵ This was also the year that the first biography on longtime president of the Society Katherine Warren was published by Alyssa Lozupone, this publication began to recognize some of the Society’s historic property purchases and sales in a format that the public could easily access.⁵²⁶

In 2016 land and buildings were valued at \$10,741,451 according to that years audit.⁵²⁷ In 2017 the values went up to \$12,087,071.⁵²⁸ This increase in evaluation can in part be explained by the transformation of the Elms Carriage House into a residence.⁵²⁹ The treasurer’s report in 2016 reported a good fiscal year for the Society.⁵³⁰ The 2017 Annual Report given in part by treasurer William F. Lucey III had this to say about the 2017 fiscal year “The Preservation Society had another terrific year in fiscal 2017.”⁵³¹ In calendar year 2017 the visitation broke 1 million for the first time at 1,017,586 for the year.⁵³²

To the Present 2018

In the 2018 audit the value of buildings and land was \$16,533,835.⁵³³ This additional value was in part due to the building of the new welcome center at the Breakers.⁵³⁴ In 2018 the Preservation Society was part of a team of Rhode Island Institutions that published a report

⁵²³ *Annual Report*, 2014-2015, 3.

⁵²⁴ *Annual Report*, 2014-2015, 5.

⁵²⁵ *Annual Report*, 2014-2015, 10.

⁵²⁶ *Annual Report*, 2014-2015, 7.

⁵²⁷ Mayer Hoffman McCann P.C., 2016 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, August 11, 2016.

⁵²⁸ Mayer Hoffman McCann P.C., 2017 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, August 25, 2017.

⁵²⁹ *Annual Report*, 2015-2016.

⁵³⁰ *Annual Report*, 2015-2016.

⁵³¹ *Annual Report*, 2016-2017.

⁵³² *Attendance sheet for the Preservation Society of Newport County*, 2017.

⁵³³ Mayer Hoffman McCann P.C., 2018 Fiscal year audit for the Preservation Society of Newport County, September 7, 2018.

⁵³⁴ *Annual Report*, 2017-2018.

called “Historic Preservation: An Overlooked Economic Driver A Study of the Impacts of Historic Preservation in Rhode Island 2018.” In the section on heritage tourism that relates specifically to Newport the brochure says

The Preservation Society is a tremendous economic engine for the community. Each year, more than \$100 million flows into the city’s and state’s economy as a direct result of the Preservation Society’s operations. Four hundred people are employed directly to protect, preserve, and present some of America’s most important historic resources.⁵³⁵

The economic impact of the Society to the city has always been a clear goal of the organization as has been the preservation of buildings that are not necessarily owned by the Society. These decision drivers made the history of buying and selling properties both logical and important. The conclusion to the study says “identification, protection, and enhancement of Rhode Island’s historic resources pays economic, social, and environmental dividends today and will pay well into the future.”⁵³⁶ The article concludes with the importance of Historic Preservation highlighted, the goal of the Society for its whole established history was validated through the study once again.

Conclusion

The greatest change in the Society’s buying practices from 1945 to present times was the focus shift from Colonial structures to Gilded Age mansions. Due to the founding of the Restoration Foundation, the Society was able to focus on the mansions that were in great danger of being demolished starting with the Elms. Between the 1940s through the 1990s the Society bought and sold multiple properties commencing with the Hunter House and ending with Chepstow. Some buildings were donated, and others purchased but more were kept then what were originally intended so that the Society could steward them for future generations. The

⁵³⁵ Place Economic, *Historic Preservation: An economic Driver, a Study of the Impacts of Historic Preservation in Rhode Island 2018*, 17.

⁵³⁶ Place Economic, *Historic Preservation: An economic Driver, a Study of the Impacts of Historic Preservation in Rhode Island 2018*, 61.

commitment to the buildings often outweighed the financial constraints that came with them, the Society chose to save buildings over their bottom line many times. This commitment is part of the reason that Newport is the well-preserved historic town that it is today. The real estate transactions that the Society undertook have helped maintain many properties. None of the houses, which they have stewarded, have been demolished due to their careful preservation and protection in the form of easements and covenants. The houses that have been transferred into private hands are still being preserved to the Society's standards, having been protected and placed into trusting hands upon their sale. The Society did not preserve all of Newport by themselves, but they have made a significant impact on its preservation and the economy of the town which is still benefiting from their presence today.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CHANGES TO THE PRESERVATION SOCIETY'S MISSION AND THEIR EVOLUTION TO THE ORGANIZATION THAT THEY ARE TODAY

Introduction

This chapter will focus on analyzing the purchasing decisions of the Preservation Society of Newport County that were detailed in Chapter Three. It will aim to put these transactions into the context of broader economic trends in the years the decisions were made. These economic trends were influenced by wars, global trends, government era policies, and recessions. This chapter will also note some supplementary examples of historic sites to place the decisions made by the Preservation Society of Newport County into a context of larger nationwide preservation trends. This section will align national, political and economic eras to periods of growth in the Society and make connections where applicable. Though it may never be possible to know exactly what was going on in the individual board members' minds as decisions were being made, in this way perhaps light can be shed on the decisions they made in the context of the time period they made them. In addition to the information provided in Chapter Three, Chapter Four provides information from Trustee meeting's notes that detail some of the discussions that went into the real estate decisions. Admittedly, the Trustee meeting's notes do not always have extensive discussions of the purchases and sales, so they are not available for every transaction that was detailed in the previous chapter. The following sections in this chapter were determined by economic period and so they do not align exactly with Chapter Three's sections. In understanding the Board's decisions to buy and sell property, we will be able to see how the Society's goals have changed over time. Chapter Four traces the evolution of the Society, originally trying to save one Colonial building from demolition until a new owner could be found, developing into an organization focused on saving and displaying several 19th century mansions.

Post World War Two 1946-1950

The Preservation Society officially began in 1946, buying their first property the Hunter House in the following year.⁵³⁷ It was also at this time that they obtained their nonprofit status officially in March 1947.⁵³⁸ In the immediate post war years between 1946 and 1950 the Society would have two more real estate interactions. The first was the purchase of Pitts Head Tavern in 1947 to serve as their headquarters and the second was the establishment of their long term leasing deal with the Breakers in 1948.⁵³⁹ The period after World War Two was characterized economically in the following relevant ways:

- 1) National surge in historic preservation
- 2) Post war improvement in the US economy
- 3) Improvement in the Newport housing market

As discussed in Chapter Two there was a surge in historic preservation interest in these years,⁵⁴⁰ this was partly because of the loss of so much historic material in Europe and the desire to prevent such loss in America.⁵⁴¹ The United States had become a primarily self-sufficient country that was now investing abroad for its economic well-being.⁵⁴² America was also able to export more than it was importing, which was good for the economy.⁵⁴³ The GI bill was helping vets buy houses improving the housing market.⁵⁴⁴ All of these factors affected the individual Newporter, which in turn affected the Society as a whole.

⁵³⁷ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Hunter House, 52-54 Washington Ave, Plat 16 Lot 32.

⁵³⁸ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 9.

⁵³⁹ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. The Breakers, 44 Ochre Point, Plat 36 Lot 59.

⁵⁴⁰ Michael A. Tomlan, *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*, (New York: Springer, 2015), 44-46.

⁵⁴¹ Michael A. Tomlan, *Historic Preservation: Caring for Our Expanding Legacy*, (New York: Springer, 2015), 36-39.

⁵⁴² United Nations: World Economic and Social Survey 2017, *Post War Reconstruction and Development in the Golden Age of Capitalism*, Accessed February 26, 2019, https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESS_2017_ch2.pdf, 30.

⁵⁴³ United Nations: World Economic and Social Survey 2017, *Post War Reconstruction and Development in the Golden Age of Capitalism*, Accessed February 26, 2019, https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESS_2017_ch2.pdf, 31.

⁵⁴⁴ Mettler, Suzanne, *Scholars Strategy New York: How the G.I. Bill Built the Middle Class and Enhanced Democracy*, Oxford University Press: 2005, https://scholars.org/sites/scholars/files/ssn_key_findings_mettler_on_gi_bill.pdf.

While the economy played a part in all transactions, it was important to note that the beginning of the Preservation Society was marked by the purchase of the Hunter House. At the onset of the Society there were no plans to create a multi-house museum display, as the organization eventually did. Initially the Society intended to save the Hunter House and sell it to a private owner who would properly maintain the house while living in it.⁵⁴⁵ The Society was interested in general preservation of the city as well. At the first board meeting of the newly founded Preservation Society two lists were made. The first list contains the preserved buildings in Newport: Trinity Church, Seventh Day Baptist Church (historical Society), Jewish Synagogue, Mawdsley House, Wanton Lyman Hazard House, Old Colony House, Redwood Library and Vernon House. The second list was of buildings which needed to be preserved: Hunter House, Pitt's Head Tavern (Charles Street), White Horse Tavern (Marlborough St.), Hannah Robinson House (Bridge St), John Bennister Town House (The Prescott, Pelham St.), John Bennister Country House (between One and Two Mile Corners), Malbone Town House (St. Clare Home), First Public School (corner Washington St. and march St.), Old Quaker Meeting House (Marlborough St.), Old Congregational Church (Mill St.), Dr. Hopkins House (Division St.), Dr. Stiles House (Clarke Street), Governor Gibbs House (Mill Street) (Garrettson House), Home of Washington Allston (Clarke Street), Asher Robbins House (Washington Square), Lopez House (Washington Square), Home on Northwest corner of Church and Division Streets, House on Southeast corner of Mary and Division streets, House on Southwest corner of Mary and Division Streets, Houses on upper Thames Street, Large Brick building corner of Dennison and Thames Streets, Brick Buildings opposite Old Fort Road.⁵⁴⁶ Interestingly all of these homes are Colonial structures. There is no mention in this early meeting of Gilded Age mansions, though by this point many of them were already being put up for sale. Many of the Colonial homes and buildings would go on to be saved by the Newport Restoration Foundation and the Newport Historical Society, but some of them would be a part of the history of the Preservation Society.

⁵⁴⁵ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 8.

⁵⁴⁶ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, August 16, 1946.

The Restoration Foundation currently stewards 70 Colonial properties⁵⁴⁷, while the Historic Society currently takes care of six historic properties.⁵⁴⁸

The interest in historic properties played a large role in the Hunter House's saving as the Society purchased it only after it was being threatened by the Metropolitan Museum.⁵⁴⁹ It is clear from the board minutes that the initial plans for the home were not to keep it as a museum. In the 1947 Board of Trustees meeting the Trustees voted that the Society would pay \$16,000 for the house.⁵⁵⁰ Noted in the early board minutes is a copy of a letter sent to Katherine Warren by Carmen Barnes Armstrong.⁵⁵¹ Armstrong was a famous author known for her works *Schoolgirls* and *Time Lay Asleep*. She married the wealthy Hamilton Fish Armstrong who was a member of several elite families in New York City.⁵⁵² Mrs. Armstrong had evidently been offered the opportunity to buy the house, but turned down the idea suggesting that the whole neighborhood needed to be preserved. She would be interested if she could collect a group of people to purchase the houses along the street and preserve the row with private ownership.⁵⁵³

Initial funding for the house was one of the topics discussed in the very first Board of Trustees meeting. Publicity was noted as being a necessary factor in funding the purchase. Exciting the entire county about the purchase would assumedly lead to its funding success. This would start with the publication of the minutes of the first meeting. It was also noted that funding for the house would create post war employment, another enticement to addressing the need to save the house.⁵⁵⁴ The initial three suggestions for the house at a 1947 board meeting were:

⁵⁴⁷ Newport Restoration Foundation. *Preservation Properties*. Accessed May 28, 2019. <http://www.newportrestoration.org/preservation/properties/>.

⁵⁴⁸ Newport Historical Society, *Properties: Six Historic Properties*, Accessed July 1, 2019, <https://newporthistory.org/tours/properties/>.

⁵⁴⁹ Desmond Guinness, and Julius Trousdale Sadler, *Newport Preserv'd: Architecture of the 18th Century*, (New York: Viking Press, 1982), 96-103.

⁵⁵⁰ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, July 8, 1947, 2.

⁵⁵¹ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes October 29, 1948, Carmen Barnes Armstrong letter.

⁵⁵² "Carman Barnes, Novelist, is Wed." *New York Times*. December 28, 1945.

<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1945/12/28/109349109.html?action=click&contentCollection=Arc hives&module=LedeAsset®ion=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=24>

⁵⁵³ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes October 29, 1948, Carmen Barnes Armstrong letter.

⁵⁵⁴ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, September 7, 1947.

- 1) The house be rented out to someone who would take care of it and open it up on certain afternoons for visitors
- 2) It be operated as a tea room
- 3) The Cincinnati Society⁵⁵⁵ (a society established to uphold revolutionary war values by descendants of soldiers in the war)⁵⁵⁶ purchase it for their headquarters

Most significantly the notes say, “The Hunter House should be made self-supporting.”⁵⁵⁷ This would never come to be. To this day the Hunter House does not support itself. The initial goal of the Society was never met, as the priorities changed over time and the Hunter House would come to represent the beginning of the Society and their only permanent Colonial building.

John Brown donated the Pitts Head Tavern building to the Preservation Society. The land upon which it sat, however, was not included in the donation as Brown did not own it. The Odd Fellows Society owned the land. It was agreed that the Preservation Society would pay a long term lease on the land for \$30 a month for ten years.⁵⁵⁸ Although the Pitts Head Tavern was donated to the Society it still came with ownership expenses on top of the money they would eventually put into its restoration.

During the 1947 Board Meeting the initial idea of taking over the Breakers and similar homes was discussed in a foreshadowing of what was to come. “The possibility of the Society taking over the Breakers and such estates was discussed, and it was agreed that the board should consider proper handling of the many aspects of such an undertaking, legal, financial and otherwise. Mr. Brown moved that a sub-committee be formed to make a study and draw up a suitable program designed to meet such an eventuality. This motion was seconded and passed.”⁵⁵⁹ The Mr. Brown mentioned in the quote was in fact John P. Brown, a member of the board of the Society.⁵⁶⁰ This is the same John Brown who had donated the Pitts Head Tavern and wrote the charter for the Preservation Society in 1945. Brown was an architect with an interest in

⁵⁵⁵ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, September 7, 1947.

⁵⁵⁶ The Society of the Cincinnati. *About: History Overview*. Accessed July 12, 2019. <https://www.societyofthecincinnati.org/about/history>.

⁵⁵⁷ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, September 7, 1947.

⁵⁵⁸ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, February 10, 1947.

⁵⁵⁹ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, June 24, 1947.

⁵⁶⁰ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, June 24, 1947.

preservation, which he used in many cities including Newport to save their historic fabric. He was an active member of the Society in its initial years.⁵⁶¹ The idea is interesting after they had explicitly stated that the Society was not attempting to operate museums.

The Society was not the first to operate a mansion as a museum, contemporary examples existed for them. During the post World War II time period in Asheville, North Carolina, The Biltmore opened as a museum. The Biltmore was America's largest private estate, built by a member of the same Vanderbilt Family from Newport. The museum became partially opened in the Great Depression but turned into a fully functioning museum at the end of the 1940s.⁵⁶² The Biltmore was an estate built by a family that also had houses in Newport, with many of their houses representing the famed Gilded Age. The estate first partly opened during the Great Depression in the hopes that it's opening would increase tourism in the area.⁵⁶³ This was an example of the trends in preservation in this time period. It was also an early example of Vanderbilt preservation, which was seen in Newport as well. Though the Preservation Society did not buy the Breakers in this post-war period, the preservationists were investing in its operation and running it as a museum to support it, their other properties, and the community's preservation efforts. They showed a societal interest in the buildings and the beginning of a pattern was emerging. Newport was not the only historic city with historic sites becoming relevant at this time, but it was creating its own preservation empire.⁵⁶⁴

Starting in 1949 America experienced a bull market, which is defined as “a market in which share prices are rising, encouraging buying.”⁵⁶⁵ This market lasted until 1956 and had a lot to do with Europe’s inability to produce on the same level that they had prior to World War Two.

⁵⁶¹ Holly Collins, *The Preservation Society of Newport County 1945-1965 the Founding Years*, September 8, 2006, https://www.newportmansions.org/documents/the_preservation_society_of_newport_county_1945.pdf, 17-18 and 25.

⁵⁶² Biltmore, *Estate History*, Accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.biltmore.com/visit/biltmore-house-gardens/estate-history>.

⁵⁶³ Biltmore, *Estate History*, Accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.biltmore.com/visit/biltmore-house-gardens/estate-history>.

⁵⁶⁴ Biltmore, *Estate History*, Accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.biltmore.com/visit/biltmore-house-gardens/estate-history>.

⁵⁶⁵ New Oxford American Dictionary, “Bull Market.”

America, whose land was physically untouched by the War with the exception of Pearl Harbor, had the upper hand in the economy. The stock market hit highs that it had not hit since before the crash of 1929.⁵⁶⁶

Publicity played a large role in the formative years of the Society's establishment. This was because with publicity there was education delivered to the county creating support, donations, and new membership. It was clear from the beginning that this Society would only be successful if they had the public's support. The Society was very vocal about this purchase of Hunter House and Pitts Head Tavern and their leasing of the Breakers.⁵⁶⁷ This is noted here because in later years the Society became less vocal about real estate investments to the point where it seemed secretive. It is important to put into context when the Society shared news and when they hid it from their membership and the public. Publicity and/or the lack thereof will be a topic discussed throughout this chapter.

1950-1953 The Korean War and Lost Documents

Between 1950 and 1953 the United States was engaged in the Korean War. While still in a bull market economy, income taxes were increased on United States citizens to help fund the war. No new property was purchased or sold by the Society in these war years. This was also the period when many of the documents from the Society have gone missing. It is therefore hard to say for sure what, if any, effect the war and its economics had on the Society. Because of these lost records, it is unknown if the lack of purchasing property was a deliberate decision by the Society or a coincidence.

⁵⁶⁶ Peter Eavis, and Stephen Grocer, *New York Times*, "A Brief History of Bull Markets, From Postwar Boom to Housing Bust," August 22, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/22/business/bull-markets-history.html>.

⁵⁶⁷ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*.

1953-1960 Cold War and Eisenhower

Politically 1953 through 1960 were years characterized by the rise in tensions during the Cold War. These were years of much conflict and strife between communism and capitalism.⁵⁶⁸ The time frame was also the period during which Dwight D. Eisenhower was President, he wanted to keep things balanced in the states, including the budgets.⁵⁶⁹ During Eisenhower's Presidency unemployment stayed low and, while there were minor recessions, the economy was generally stable and on the rise. Many people during this time were buying their first houses.⁵⁷⁰ During this period the country was also investing in the nation's roads and highways making tourist travel by car easier. The 1950s were a period in contrast to an era of conspicuous consumption, people were not building estates to themselves as they once were and these mansions were beginning to become relics of a lost time. This period of prosperity created confidence in both the Society and the City to acquire more property including the White Horse Tavern and the Arnold Burying Ground.

In 1954 the Society acquired the White Horse Tavern, their long sought after prize, and also the Arnold Burying Ground.⁵⁷¹ The Tavern was obtained after a donation to the Society of \$20,000 and the Burial Ground was donated.⁵⁷² The Arnold Burying Ground was given to the Society so that they could protect it from damage and loss.⁵⁷³ The Burial site would not bring in money, as it was an open park site. The Society has never sold tickets to it, they had no potential for fiscal growth from the site. Perhaps, the Society chose to enhance their public image as a preservation organization and Newport's reputation as an historic city rather than take the site on

⁵⁶⁸ Department of State: Office of the Historian, *Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations*, Accessed February 21, 2019, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960>.

⁵⁶⁹ The White House, *Dwight D. Eisenhower*, Accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/dwight-d-eisenhower/>.

⁵⁷⁰ Chester J. Pach, Jr, University OF Virginia Miller Center, *Dwight D. Eisenhower: Domestic Affairs*, Accessed February 22, 2019, <https://millercenter.org/president/eisenhower/domestic-affairs>.

⁵⁷¹ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Arnold Burial Ground, Pelham Street, Plat 24 Lot 308.

⁵⁷² Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Arnold Burial Ground, Pelham Street, Plat 24 Lot 308.

⁵⁷³ Preservation Society of Newport County, *Arnold Burying Ground*, Accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.newportmansions.org/learn/landscape/arnold-burying-ground>.

for their economic potential. This is one of many examples that show the interest that the Society put into the city which is at least partly altruistic in nature. Its fiscal benefits, if any, would not be straight forward. It also adds to the character of the town so while there may not have been money changing hands it added to the experience of a historic town. There were also high donations in 1954 stated as being \$79,196.04.⁵⁷⁴ This was the first year noted that the Society was making a profit from their endeavors.⁵⁷⁵ These numbers suggest a stable economy as many people were donating to a newly formed Society at numerous levels.

The initial plan for the Tavern was to run it as such, so the Society thought at this time that they would be successful in that pursuit.⁵⁷⁶ The Society would not have entered into this ownership had they not believed that they could run the restaurant successfully leading to the assumption that they had a confidence in the economy and tourist environment at the time.⁵⁷⁷

The White Horse Tavern would take up a large portion of the Board of Trustees time in the years following its purchase. From its acquisition to its management, repairs, and leases the building was discussed at length and was noted many times in the recorded minutes.⁵⁷⁸ It was clear from these many discussions that the Tavern and its operations were important to the Society, despite the fact that they were never able to make the restaurant a sustainable business. As much of this discussion happened in the early days of the Society it was demonstrative of the role this building played in the beginning and made the shift toward Gilded Age buildings in its later years even more dramatic. It can also be inferred that the Society learned its lesson from this acquisition, as this was the only building that they tried to run as a business outside of museum space. It would take over two decades for the Society to accept that they could not run a restaurant and sell it. This was a very expensive lesson for them to learn.

⁵⁷⁴ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 28.

⁵⁷⁵ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 28.

⁵⁷⁶ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 14th, 1957.

⁵⁷⁷ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 28.

⁵⁷⁸ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, May 22, 1964, January 16, 1970, October 17, 1958, May 28, 1969.

In 1959 the Society was given money to buy Rovensky Park.⁵⁷⁹ This plot of land had again no potential income and would only ever cost the Society money in upkeep.⁵⁸⁰ This was important to the Society as the plot of land not only created a public space for recreation, but also protected that area of Bellevue Avenue from development and a visual disturbance to the historic buildings. In 1959 the Society also began renting space in the Brick Market.⁵⁸¹ Starting in 1958 the Society began putting money aside for the renovation of the Brick Market costing them thousands of dollars, they intended to open it to public viewing in 1959.⁵⁸² This way they could preserve the building even if they were not going to use all of its space. At this point they owned Hunter House, Pitts Head Tavern, White Horse Tavern, Arnold Burying Ground, and Rovensky Park, and were renting or leasing the Brick Market and the Breakers.

It was during this period that public conversations about what properties the Society had ever owned start emerging, and a few of those properties come under debate. The writings of the Society and the deed records tell different stories. First of the houses to be debated were the two houses adjacent to the Hunter House, which were also sometimes noted as one house and sometimes not noted at all.⁵⁸³ According to William Corcoran, the Society's lawyer who admittedly did not work for the Society when the property was bought, it was unlikely that there were other homes on the property.⁵⁸⁴ There was also the case of the August Lucas House that was noted in the Society's publications as being bought and sold in one week in 1959.⁵⁸⁵ There was no evidence in the deeds for this either. Both of these acquisitions were important enough to be mentioned in the Society's report, but they may have never happened. They were noted throughout the Society's annual reports, but not consistently adding more curiosity to the situation. Sometimes they were not included in their lists of properties formerly owned,

⁵⁷⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 16th, 1959.

⁵⁸⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 16th, 1959.

⁵⁸¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 16th, 1959.

⁵⁸² Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, October 17, 1958.

⁵⁸³ Warren, *The Preservation Society of Newport County: Report by the President for the Years 1945-1953*, 25.

⁵⁸⁴ Interview with William Corcoran Lawyer for the Preservation Society of Newport County. Conducted by Hannah Miller on April 17, 2019.

⁵⁸⁵ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, November 1959 number 5.

sometimes they were. There was no mention of the August Lucas house in the Trustee Meeting notes and conflicting brief mentions of the Hunter house throughout the notes.

As of March 31st, 1958, the Society held \$205,022.41 in real and personal property. It's current limit, according to the State of Rhode Island, was \$150,000.⁵⁸⁶ The limit was set by the state so they could keep track of how much untaxed property the nonprofit could own. This way the State would be kept aware of any money being taken off their tax rolls. The organization submitted a request to increase this amount to \$750,000 in 1958, which was approved.⁵⁸⁷ The preservation leaders at the Society saw the possibility for large amounts of acquisitions in their near future and the potential to expand.⁵⁸⁸ This potential tells the reader that the Society may have been gearing up for more purchases. The \$600,000 increase would be worth well over \$5 million today.⁵⁸⁹

Another grand estate moving away from private ownership in this era was the Hearst Castle in California, which provides an example of the preservation that was going on in other parts of the country. This estate was an example of a mansion being turned into a house museum and provided the Society with another example of the public's interest in visiting these mansions. The property, which started in 1865 with a purchase of 40,000 acres by George Hearst, had grown to 250,000 acres in 1919 when William Randolph Hearst employed Julia Morgan to build the estate.⁵⁹⁰ The castle was unfinished when Hearst left it in 1947 and the Spanish Colonial Revival structure began its search for a new owner.⁵⁹¹ UC Berkley made its interest in the estate known before Hearst's death, but they were unable to manage the sprawling resort so they never took ownership of it. In 1958, the Hearst Corporation donated the site to the People of the State

⁵⁸⁶ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 1958.

⁵⁸⁷ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 1958.

⁵⁸⁸ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 1958.

⁵⁸⁹ Us Inflation Calculator, Accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>.

⁵⁹⁰ Hearst Castle, *Hearst Castle History and Art*, Accessed February 21, 2019, <http://hearstcastle.org/history-behind-hearst-castle/>.

⁵⁹¹ Hearst Castle, *Hearst Castle History and Art*, Accessed February 21, 2019, <http://hearstcastle.org/history-behind-hearst-castle/>.

of California.⁵⁹² Again we see a grand estate following patterns of donation (in this case donated to the state) that provided an example similar to what was happening in Newport, only the donations were instead going to non-profit organizations. Like the Hearst Castle, more houses would be looking for new caretakers in Newport and the Preservation Society would work to take up that charge.

On the other side of the country was Vizcaya, a Miami mansion built for James Deering constructed from 1914-1916. James died in 1925 and passed the Gilded Age structure to his brother Charles who passed away only two years later. In 1935 the estate was opened as a privately-owned museum. Vizcaya was met with many troubles, including hurricanes, which forced the owners to sell much of its surrounding land to pay for the upkeep of the house. In 1955 the house was given to the county so that it could be preserved and continue to be opened as a public museum.⁵⁹³ Again an example of an estate where the heirs cannot afford to keep it or preserve it properly so they give their property over to another entity. In this case they gave it to the local government, but much of the circumstances leading up to that decision are the same. Despite personal efforts by heirs to continue the house's legacy it became too much of an imposition. Instead of selling it to developers, who would see it destroyed, they gave it to a body of people interested in its preservation and value as a cultural heritage site.

1961-1964 Kennedy and Lowering Taxes

Kennedy was elected in 1960 and took office in 1961. Upon taking office unemployment was at the high rate of 6.8%. The minor recession of 1958 had left its mark on the country and the new young President had plans to reduce individual and corporate tax rates.⁵⁹⁴ Unfortunately

⁵⁹² Hearst Castle. *Tour History*. Accessed February 21, 2019. <http://hearstcastle.org/history-behind-hearst-castle/the-castle/tour-history/>.

⁵⁹³ Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, *Timeline*, Accessed July 1, 2019, <http://vizcaya.org/about-timeline.asp>.

⁵⁹⁴ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, *John F. Kennedy on the Economy and Taxes*, Accessed February 18, 2019, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/john-f-kennedy-on-the-economy-and-taxes>.

his premature death in 1963 stopped him short of finishing these economic plans.⁵⁹⁵ His assassination caused a run on the market and in the half an hour after news of his death arrived the DOW dropped 21.6 points, however on the next day the market opened the DOW went back up 32.03 points.⁵⁹⁶ The early 1960s were relatively stable economically, though there was push for change, not much occurred until years later. It was within this somewhat economically stable environment that the Society made the decisions to buy and sell in large quantities for the first time in their history. At the time, though they were still a young organization, they made purchases that were risky and cost them financially. The Society also accepted donations that had both the potential to make them money and had a cost associated with them. It was in this time frame that their commitment to the city, despite its lack of support for them, was made abundantly clear as they continued to support the town despite their perceived unfair taxation.

In 1961 the Society purchased the Colonial Rogers House at 37 Touro through a donation of funds from the local Diocese.⁵⁹⁷ The Society also purchased a parking lot for the Breakers for \$10,000.⁵⁹⁸ They began to sublet the colonial Brick Market space at this point, as they no longer had a need for it.⁵⁹⁹ In the fifteen year history of the existence of the Society the Rogers house would now serve as their third headquarters, showing their continued growth and presence in the community. In 1961 the Society did not own the Breakers but chose to permanently purchase this subordinate property, this displayed three characteristics of the Society. First that the Society was willing to invest money in their city's Gilded Age history with no official guarantee that it would be theirs to show in perpetuity. Second, that they wanted to protect the surrounding grounds of the Breakers, and by buying this land they prevented others from buying it and building out of

⁵⁹⁵ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, *November 22, 1963: Death of a President*, Accessed February 19, 2019, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/november-22-1963-death-of-the-president>.

⁵⁹⁶ Alexander R. Hammer, *New York Times*, "Stocks Close off A bit in Session Cut Short By Reagan Shooting," March 31, 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/03/31/business/stocks-close-off-a-bit-in-session-cut-short-by-reagan-shooting.html>.

⁵⁹⁷ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Rogers House, 37 Touro, Plat 24 Lot 14.

⁵⁹⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 30th, 1962.

⁵⁹⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, September 29th, 1961.

place structures on the site. This threat could have affected the historic atmosphere of the town and the character of the Breakers. Third, this was a reaction to the citizens of Newport to the traffic congestion of the former system of on-street parking for visitors.

In the same fashion in 1962 the Society bought The Elms, the land associated with it, and its stables.⁶⁰⁰ This purchase was made in order to save the property from subdivision. The grand estate was seen as a turning point for the Society as noted in the *New York Times*.⁶⁰¹ This again showed the Society's ability and necessity for saving the community as a whole, not just the individual buildings. It was the first case, but not the last, of the Society stepping in to save a Gilded Age building from ruin in a change from their Colonial focus. Their actions were not just for the sake of the individual building but also for the sake of the historic character of the city, which to their minds had the ability to be affected by the loss of each and every historic property. The Elms was a turning point for the Society, this was the first Gilded Age home that the Society outright owned. It would begin their pattern of buying more houses of this time period and style even though the Society had originally set out to be the saviors of specifically Colonial buildings less than twenty years prior to this purchase.

Rental income was also important in 1963, as the Society started renting out Pitts Head Tavern. They were now using 37 Touro, the Rogers House, as their headquarters and Pitts was sitting empty while the Brick Market was being rented out. The Society was looking for a year-round tenant for the property that had previously been rented out to Restorations Inc. since their move to the Brick Market. The Society decided to rent the space out for \$50 on a month-by-month lease agreement until they could find such a tenant.⁶⁰² Interestingly while 37 Touro was serving as Society headquarters, part of the building was also being rented out to the City Chamber of Commerce. Due to this accommodating rental agreement the Chamber of Commerce

⁶⁰⁰ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. The Elms, 367 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 35 Lot 48, The Elms 367 Bellevue Ave, July 23rd, 1962, Book 206 Page 556.

⁶⁰¹ Davis, *Gilded: How Newport Became America's Richest Resort*, 209.

⁶⁰² Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, May 17, 1963.

became a positive ally in the Society's push for historic zoning in the City.⁶⁰³ The initial interest in renting rather than an outright sale demonstrates the Society's plan and desire of keeping the building and their ability to do so.

The Society had been declared an official nonprofit since their founding, but the State of Rhode Island thought they should still pay property taxes on the Elms in 1963.⁶⁰⁴ This was one of many tax disputes that the Society would have with the State of Rhode Island and the local government. Despite these issues and the considerable cost, which would have been high taxes on a property the size of the Elms, the Society continued 1963 with real estate transactions of two more properties.

The Society bought and sold 81 Second Street in one day at the price of \$4,500.⁶⁰⁵ The house had been previously mentioned in the Society's publication as a property that was significant to the city.⁶⁰⁶ The property at 81 Second Street was most recently sold in 2017 for \$1,075,000. It currently serves as a single-family house and has retained most of its integrity as a historic site.⁶⁰⁷ The Preservation Society sold the property to the Newport Gas Light Company, who sold it into private hands two years later for \$5,500. No easements run with this property.⁶⁰⁸ It was both interesting and unclear from the Society's documents why the Preservation Society became involved with this property, they made no profit from the sale and they held no easements on the property. Based on the Society's own publication the site was considered important to the city's character, but the organization still did not keep it. The building was in a historic district so perhaps the Society thought that offered it enough protection, and as they were selling it to a corporation that may too have played a role in the decision.⁶⁰⁹ This was either their

⁶⁰³ Interview with William Corcoran Lawyer for the Preservation Society of Newport County. Conducted by Hannah Miller on April 17, 2019.

⁶⁰⁴ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 25th, 1963.

⁶⁰⁵ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. 81 Second Street, Plat 12 Lot 17.

⁶⁰⁶ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, 1945-1947 special number.

⁶⁰⁷ Newport, RI, *Vision Government Solutions*, 81 Second Street, <http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=2446>.

⁶⁰⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 81 Second St, Book 214 Page 453.

⁶⁰⁹ Tax Assessor's Map, City of Newport Rhode Island, Plat 12, <http://www.cityofnewport.com/home/showdocument?id=12558>.

first or second real estate sale depending on whether or not one decided to include the Lucas house, which it was not clear that they ever owned. Either way this was early on in their history and perhaps they were not yet aware or able to handle the responsibilities that came with easements on the property.

The John Goddard house at 81 Second Street was mentioned twice in the Society's Board Minutes. First, that the house would be purchased for no more than \$4,000.⁶¹⁰ One of the board members also mentioned that he had a friend who would buy the house from the Society, but that the friend did not wish to be named.⁶¹¹ This does little to clear up the reasoning for the Society's involvement in the property and swift sale which was more than the agreed upon \$4,000. They paid more than they voted on for the property and there was no obvious reason why they had to purchase the house first and why the intended buyer couldn't just purchase it outright. Though it does again demonstrate their commitment to saving historic structures.

This year also saw the purchase of their second Gilded Age mansion, the Marble House.⁶¹² In the October 5th, 1963 Trustee Minutes the board was presented with an offer to purchase the Marble House by a third party member who wanted to remain anonymous until the purchase went through, along with the donation of \$25,000. The anonymous donor would turn out to be a member of the Vanderbilt family.⁶¹³ The estate cost the Society \$50,000. The money was donated by a member of the Vanderbilt family for the expressed purpose of the Society buying the Vanderbilt home. The building was purchased for them and it did not directly cost the Society anything.⁶¹⁴ This was symbolic in that the Vanderbilt legacy played such a large role in that of Newport. Many families were vital in the establishment of the town and its famed houses as discussed previously in Chapter Two. The Vanderbilt's, however, were responsible for what are today arguably the two most famous homes in Newport: The Breakers and Marble House.

⁶¹⁰ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 18, 1963.

⁶¹¹ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, March 15, 1963.

⁶¹² Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Mable House, 596 Bellevue Avenue, Plat 37 Lot 18.

⁶¹³ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, October 5, 1963

⁶¹⁴ *Marble House: The William K. Vanderbilt Mansion*. Newport: Preservation Society of Newport County, 1965.

These two homes are also in the rare breed of historic house museum that pay for themselves. The Vanderbilt legacy is told through these houses and their commitment to them. This large purchase created financial difficulties for the Society. Though the money was donated for the site and its land, the organization was still being forced to pay taxes at this time, and there was the upkeep of the site, the addition of the home caused severe financial strife for the organization initially.⁶¹⁵ There was little push back noted on the deal. It was agreed by the board that it was essential to acquire the house despite the cost. This financial burden was not a surprise for the Society as they had already taken over the Elms and thus knew the burden that came with the estates. That they chose to take on the project regardless shows both their commitment to saving the Gilded age mansions and also their importance to the city's legacy. According to long time Lawyer of the Society, William Corcoran who has been associated with the Society since 1958, the switch to Gilded Age mansions was more circumstantial than intentional. After the purchase of the Elms the Society became associated with these mansions. It was because of their swift intervention with the Elms that the organization started down this road.⁶¹⁶

Regarding the acquisition of Marble House, the board voted and decided that the deal be accepted as long as there were no restrictions to it and the furniture of the estate be permanently loaned to the Society.⁶¹⁷ Here we see the Society realizing that they can only take on properties which do not come with restrictions and that come with certain necessities, money to handle the cost of owning such large properties and furniture so that they could be shown as staged houses.

Despite financial issues caused by the purchase of Marble House, the Society went ahead and acquired three more properties in the following year 1964. The Colonial house on 30 Thames Street was donated to the Society and had a covenant on it that required it to be used as a single-family home in perpetuity.⁶¹⁸ This was the first instance of the Society being given a

⁶¹⁵ Annual Meeting Minutes, October 16th, 1964.

⁶¹⁶ Interview with William Corcoran Lawyer for the Preservation Society of Newport County. Conducted by Hannah Miller on April 17, 2019.

⁶¹⁷ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, October 5, 1963.

⁶¹⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Tom Gibson House 30 Thames Street, February 1st, 1965, Book 213 Page 4.

house that they could use neither as a museum nor as an office space. They did not pay for the house, but they were embattled with tax debates and had to pay for the house's upkeep. It was still an expense to the Society, which they willingly accepted. This partly would have been because the home would hypothetically make the Society a profit once it was sold, however it also showed the Society had a greater commitment to the city as a whole. They chose to steward this home until it found new owners. Because they did not have a deal set up for the sale of the property this was a gamble, as they did not know how long the property would stay in their possession. But they did know that they could not use it for Society purposes. This commitment was a theme that runs along with the preservation, financial benefit, and economic well-being of all these deals. The story of how they came to own this house is as follows: in 1964 The Society was presented with the option to receive 30 Thames Street as a donation. According to the May 22nd, 1964 Trustee minutes Muriel Case had bought 30 and 34 Thames Street with the intent to restore them. After restoring 34 Thames Street and moving into the building Ms. Case decided the undertaking of restoring 30 Thames Street was too much and she wanted to donate it to the Society so that its restoration could proceed. One of the board members believed that she had a friend who would buy the house from the Society and it was decided that the organization would hold off on deciding what to do about the house until this friend could be verified.⁶¹⁹ Notably attached to this conversation is the recognition that the Society needed to establish rules about their policy on accepting donations of old houses, "meanwhile a committee be formed to set a policy of accepting or refusing old houses."⁶²⁰ At the first meeting of the next year on January 6th, 1965, it was voted that the deed of 30 Thames Street, which the Society had accepted, be transferred to Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Wharton Jr. There was no money exchanged for this house, but restrictions were put on it including the house's accurate preservation and that the home was only used as a single family dwelling.⁶²¹ In this instance the Society made no money on the transaction, but were simply working on behalf of the preservation of the house. Muriel

⁶¹⁹ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, May 22, 1964.

⁶²⁰ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, May 22, 1964.

⁶²¹ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 1, 1965.

Case would later prove a benefactor for them so while no cash was made on this deal, pleasing this associate would prove beneficial for them in the future.

The next real estate deal noted for the Preservation Society was the curious case of the park at Thames and Cross St. on which they appear to have lost \$4,000 in nine days.⁶²² It appears that this was intentional. The property was sold to the city in combination of other deals. The deeds and Society's public publications and meetings provided no clear answer on why this was done. It is interesting that it was only discussed in private board meetings and not made clear to the general public or their members. It was agreed that the Society would buy the park and deed it to the city for a loss as long as the city agreed to demolish the buildings on the property and keep it as a park in perpetuity.⁶²³ "Preservation Society offered to purchase a parcel of real estate located at the corner of Thames Street and Cross Street and to deed the same to the City of Newport on condition that the City demolishes the buildings thereon and that the City create and maintain a public park on the premises"⁶²⁴

The final purchase of 1964 was a parking lot for the Marble House on Bellevue Avenue.⁶²⁵ Again, while the parking lot serves a practical purpose for visitors, it also provided protection for the famed avenue by preventing others from being able to build on or subdivide the lot.

1965- 1975 Vietnam War, Nixon, Change in Tax Laws and Inflation

The Vietnam War era affected the economy from 1965-1975, budgetary increases for the war began in 1966 and throughout there was great inflation. The public response to the war was negative. For this reason, the federal government attempted to avoid income tax increases, though there was a notable one between 1968 and 1970, by 10%. The Tax Reform Act of 1969 included an increase in the standard deduction for charitable donations. There was also the

⁶²² Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Thames and Cross Street Park, December 9th, 1964, Book 212 Page 429 and Book 212 page 474.

⁶²³ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, City resolution no 155-164 Thames and Cross St. Park, November 18, 1964.

⁶²⁴ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, City resolution no 155-164 Thames and Cross St. Park, November 18, 1964.

⁶²⁵ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Marble House Parking Lot Plat 37 Lot 14, book 211 page 112.

Revenue Act of 1971, which again increased the standard deduction for charitable donations. Nixon imposed price controls on the country from 1971-1974.⁶²⁶ This was also a period of political anxiety as it was in the reign of Nixon, his impeachment proceedings, and his resignation. Essentially this era was economically difficult, and the country was in turmoil over an unpopular war. This explained to some extent why the Society saw so many donations in this period: because of the increased deductions allowed. As the economy was doing badly people were getting rid of their property to stewards who wanted them and whom they knew would be able to handle them. By giving property away, with money set aside for the mansions in the form of endowments, the owners were protecting the properties and saving their heirs from inheritance tax as well as the burden of having to assume the property taxes. On properties such as these taxes alone would be astronomical, along with the upkeep, many heirs would not be able or willing to afford the burden.

In 1965 the Society sold the Colonial house 30 Thames Street for less than \$100. This structure was donated so while some money was lost on upkeep it would have been minor since they owned it for less than one month.⁶²⁷ In this case the Society was not using this structure as a revenue source, but were instead stewarding it until it could find new ownership with people who would not destroy its structural integrity. Currently the house still exists as a single-family home. It most recently sold in 2003 for \$580,000.⁶²⁸

The Society sold one house and bought another, this one on 31 Walnut Street. This house was purchased for \$12,000.⁶²⁹ In their publication the acquisition was described as a necessity for saving the structure. So, while they had essentially just given away a rather similar structure, they were buying this one to save it. Not necessarily as a monetary investment, it was an

⁶²⁶ Marc Labonte, and Mindy Levit, CRS Report for Congress, *Financing Issues and Economic Effects of American Wars*, July 29, 2008, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL31176.pdf>.

⁶²⁷ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. 30 Thames Street, Plat 17 Lot 303.

⁶²⁸ Newport, RI, *Vision Government Solutions*, 30 Thames Street, <http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=3448>

⁶²⁹ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Tom Gibson House 30 Thames Street, February 1st, 1965, Book 213 Page 6.

investment esthetically, and was not to be added to their collection permanently.⁶³⁰ It was also in this year that they sold the Pitts Head Tavern outright.⁶³¹

At the end of 1964 the Board of Trustees voted that the Pitts Head Tavern should be put up for sale after the rental attempts failed.⁶³² At the January 6th, 1965 meeting it was noted that John Perkins Brown, the original donator of the Tavern, wanted to be reimbursed \$3000 upon the sale of Pitts Head Tavern, due to his initial donation of the property. The Society was working to find a different number that would satisfy both parties.⁶³³ At the March 1st meeting in 1965 it was voted that the “disposal of Pitts Head Tavern to an individual be ratified.”⁶³⁴ What was missing from the minutes was to whom they planned to sell for, how much, and if they were aware of the plans for the house after its sale. Pitts Head Tavern was picked up and moved to another location immediately after its sale, which was not noted in the board minutes at all. They either did not know of this plan or it did not matter to them, either of which says something interesting about their involvement in the property and its preservation after they sold it.

In 1966 and 1967 the Preservation Society made no new sales or purchases. In 1968 there was one transaction and which was the donation of the Auton house at 100 Harrison Avenue Mary Latham G. Judge willed this house to the Society.⁶³⁵ It was given without restrictions to the organization.

In 1968 the Newport Restoration Foundation was created by the famed Doris Duke, who was primarily concerned with Colonial buildings and had a close working connection with Katherine Warren.⁶³⁶ The Restoration Foundation owns and rents out 70 buildings in Newport, Rhode Island and preserves them for generations thanks to its uncommon method of renting out

⁶³⁰ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, February 1966 number 25.

⁶³¹ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 6, 1965.

⁶³² Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, December 18, 1964.

⁶³³ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 6, 1965.

⁶³⁴ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, March 1, 1965.

⁶³⁵ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Harrison House, 100 Harrison Avenue, Plat 41 Lot 10.4.

⁶³⁶ Newport Restoration Foundation, *Doris Duke*, Accessed February 19, 2019, <http://www.newportrestoration.org/doris-duke/>.

the properties but never allowing them to be purchased.⁶³⁷ After the founding of the Restoration Foundation the Society moved further away from its Colonial building activities, which were the reason for its start. The Restoration Foundation was working to protect the “Colonials” so the Preservation Society could focus on other matters such as the Gilded Age estates. There were many stories about Duke and Warren dividing their attention toward properties and, while those stories will never be known to be true or false, the results are the same. This new Foundation’s existence changed the views of the Society and enabled the Society to focus on other buildings while knowing that the Colonial structures were still in safe hands.

The Auton House at 100 Harrison Ave was sold on October 16th, 1969, a short time after its bequest to the Society. It was purchased from the organization for \$85,000. They took on the building for its safe guarding, but they could not keep up with the expense of it, so they sold it and made a profit.⁶³⁸ Presently 100 Harrison Ave still stands as a private home and has been combined with 96 Harrison Ave. The last estimated value of the property was \$2,643,300 in 2018.⁶³⁹

Initially the Society had planned to take on the Auton House property as a rental property so that they could retain ownership of the site and offset the costs of owning it. Specifically, the apartment over the garage of the house was believed to be an ideal apartment rental space.⁶⁴⁰ This initial interest in renting out the property led to offers.⁶⁴¹ By May of 1969, however, the Society realized that they stood to make more off the property’s sale than its rental. They listed the house at \$70,000 without the furniture and voted that they should take that price if offered.⁶⁴² October 16th, 1969 it was voted that the Auton house would be sold for \$85,000, \$10,000 of

⁶³⁷ Newport Restoration Foundation, *Mission*, Accessed February 19, 2019,
<http://www.newportrestoration.org/mission/>.

⁶³⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 100 Harrison Avenue, February 1st, 1965, Book 228 Page 512

⁶³⁹ Newport, RI, *Vision Government Solutions*, 100 Harrison Avenue,
<http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?pid=8335>.

⁶⁴⁰ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, August 23, 1968.

⁶⁴¹ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, November 15, 1968.

⁶⁴² Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, May 28, 1968.

which was for the furniture on the property.⁶⁴³ \$50,000 of this price went into the Society's endowment fund.⁶⁴⁴

In 1969 and 1970 the Society purchased Chateau-Ser-Mer for \$115,105 and paid additional money for its surrounding land between December 31st and February 10th.⁶⁴⁵ They immediately sold the carriage house they had just bought with the property to Salve Regina College for \$29,265 on February 10th, 1970.⁶⁴⁶ The Chateau-Ser-Mer property borders the land owned by Salve Regina. Chateau-Sur-Mer is presently still owned by the Society and Salve Regina is still in possession of the carriage house that they use as a preservation lab and studio.⁶⁴⁷ By 1970 the Society was already in possession of several carriage houses including the Breakers and Elms. It was possible that they did not see the necessity of another one and with an interested party who they knew would preserve it they chose to sell the property and use the money to support other projects.

The Society put an initial bid on Chateau-Sur-Mer and its surrounding properties at \$225,000, which they would later raise to a total of \$230,100. The house was furnished with a \$10,000 donation, funded by Doris Duke to help the Society furnish their houses.⁶⁴⁸ In order to buy Chateau-Sur-Mer, in fact, the Society obtained a mortgage loan from Miss Duke. The \$150,000 loan was to be paid back on December 31st, 1970. In the January 16th, 1970 minutes the board decided, with the permission of Miss Duke, that the loan be given a six month extension to June 30th, 1971.⁶⁴⁹

Once the Chateau was purchased by the Society it was decided that Salve Regina College be allowed to buy the carriage house for \$75,000. The College also agreed that any changes to be

⁶⁴³ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, October 16, 1969.

⁶⁴⁴ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, June 30, 1969.

⁶⁴⁵ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Chateau-Sur-Mer 474 Bellevue Ave, December 31st, 1969 and February 10th, 1970, Book 228 page 489-495 and Book 229 Page 25-26.

⁶⁴⁶ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Chateau-Sur-Mer Carriage House 474 Bellevue Ave, February 10th, 1970, book 229 page 28.

⁶⁴⁷ Salve Regina University, *Laboratories Cultural and Historic Preservation*, Accessed February 20, 2019, <https://salve.edu/cultural-and-historic-preservation/laboratories>.

⁶⁴⁸ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, September 12, 1969.

⁶⁴⁹ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 16, 1970.

made to the building would have to be approved by the Society and that other bordering buildings on Society property would be preserved. Salve Regina requested that it be put in the deed that the Society give them the first right of refusal on the rest of Chateau-Sur-Mer property, but the Society only accepted a verbal agreement so as not to prevent the potential of a future sale later.⁶⁵⁰ Showing that, in the beginning, they were unsure if they would keep the property.

The Chateau-Sur-Mer loan was not yet paid when the Society began negotiations to buy the Breakers. This was of great concern for the board members of the Society. As they had asked for and been granted repeated extensions on the loan, it was feared that buying another mansion without paying off their last one would be in “poor taste.” It was even suggested that the Chateau be sold to pay off the loan before the Breakers was purchased.⁶⁵¹ In order to pay off the loan and pay for the Breakers and its maintenance the Society would need between \$600,000 and \$750,000.⁶⁵² On November 17, 1972 the Society voted to pay off the \$100,000 owed to Doris Duke in favor of a bank mortgage, which would not carry the same political meaning and need to give back for publicity reasons. Owing a donor to the Society who was also a public figure and restoration advocate was looked at as bad publicity and policy, while owing a bank was seen as the price of doing business. They received a loan of \$100,000 to be paid back by July 1st, 1973.⁶⁵³

The next building the Society sold was 31 Walnut Street. On June 8th, 1970 31 Walnut sold for \$7,000 after paying \$12,000 for it five years prior.⁶⁵⁴ This year was a fiscally difficult one for the Society, as was demonstrated by the sale and need for income of Auton house and the Chateau-Sur-Mer Carriage house. They did sell the property however, to the newly established Restoration Foundation, with whom the president had a personal relationship and whom they knew would steward the property well. A consolation for selling the property at a loss was that

⁶⁵⁰ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, October 16, 1969.

⁶⁵¹ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, September 23, 1970.

⁶⁵² Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, July 14, 1972.

⁶⁵³ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, November 17, 1972.

⁶⁵⁴ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. 31 Walnut Street, Plat 12 Lot 68.

they bought the house to save it from destruction and sold it to a group of people whom they knew had the same interest for it. Their purpose of purchasing the house to save it was fulfilled even though it cost them monetarily.

The property 31 Walnut and the parking lot behind the White Horse Tavern were bundled into one deal, which is why upon first glance they make little sense as individual deals. The Society technically took a loss on the 31 Walnut Street property, but because it was connected to this other deal it was not fiscally irresponsible.⁶⁵⁵ The land at 18 Farewell Street, however, was not vacant at the inception of the idea to make it a parking lot. Part of the deal to acquire the property was that the Newport Restoration Society first demolishes the building that was already on the property so that it could be used for a parking lot before the Society bought it.⁶⁵⁶ Society Lawyer William Corcoran is of the opinion that the homes that were previously on the property were not historic or significant and that because the Society and the White Horse Tavern stood to gain more from a parking lot than their existence the decision was made to demolish them.⁶⁵⁷ This is a case of two preservation minded organizations intentionally demolishing a property, however.

In 1970 at the same time they were selling property, they paid \$12,000 to buy the parking lot of the White Horse Tavern on July 7th, 1970.⁶⁵⁸ This purchase showed their commitment to the restaurant enterprise which they had just received a liquor license for after much effort and pushback.⁶⁵⁹ The addition of the parking lot showed the intended length of stay for the Society, with the addition of the liquor license they thought that they would be able to successfully run the Tavern that they had not been able to for several decades. In 1970 the Society also saw the reversal of the State taxing the organization for their property despite their non-profit status.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁵ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, May 15, 1970.

⁶⁵⁶ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 16, 1970.

⁶⁵⁷ Interview with William Corcoran Lawyer for the Preservation Society of Newport County. Conducted by Hannah Miller on April 17, 2019.

⁶⁵⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, White Horse Tavern Parking Lot 16 Farwell Street, Book 230 Page 237.

⁶⁵⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1969.

⁶⁶⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1969.

This indicated the State's recognition of the Society as a nonprofit and perhaps as an economic producer for the state, so the state paid back the taxes which the Society had been paying and agreed not to charge them further.⁶⁶¹ The record of taxes paid between August 15th, 1962 and August 15th, 1968 are recorded in a document titled *The Preservation Society of Newport County Taxes paid under Protest by Properties Record*. The following properties were being taxed, Breakers parking lot, White Horse Tavern, station wagon, the Elms, Rovensky Park, Rogers House, Marble House, Marble House Parking Lot, Breakers Truck, Business van. The total in taxes for these properties in this time period added up to \$32,713.63.⁶⁶² Receiving these back taxes and not having to pay future taxes would have been a major contribution to financial stability for the Society.

Rosecliff was the largest donation to the Society to date in 1972, when it was given outright to them along with a \$300,000 endowment. The building was largely in a good state when it was donated.⁶⁶³ This addition was geographically logical to the Society and fit in with the story they were creating along Bellevue Avenue of the Gilded Age. The house cost them nothing to buy and came with a built-in maintenance budget. This was after they had been released from their previous tax issues so the financial burden of the property would be minimal to what it could have been without these factors. The choice to accept the property was logical, financially sound, and added to the marketing strategy.

The year 1972 was the single year that the Society acquired the most property of any in their history. This was interesting for many reasons including that they had sold the Auton House two years prior citing financial reasons. The first purchase was that of the Breakers and the Breakers stables, property that they had been paying for all maintenance needs since 1965 along with their initial \$1 a year agreement. Because they had already been paying for its upkeep the only other expense that the purchase would cause them would be the actual sales fee. The

⁶⁶¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1969.

⁶⁶² Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, November 7, 1968.

⁶⁶³ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1972 number 50.

conditions put on the sale are listed in Chapter Three. The property cost them \$366,475.⁶⁶⁴ This purchase, though substantial in monetary value, was viewed by the board as essential to the legacy of the Society and so they acquired a bank loan to secure it. To this day the Breakers is the most iconic house in Newport and attracts annually the most visitors, had the property gone to someone else either another Society would be reaping the benefits of the properties or the mansion could have been destroyed to make way for new construction. The Society was committed to the property since their lease began in 1948, it would have been illogical for them not to purchase the property outright.

The purchase of the Breakers was perhaps the most complicated deal that the Society brokered. Starting in 1970 initial inquiries were made about the purchase of the property, beginning in October by Katherine Warren. The heirs of Gladys Szchenyi offered an initial sale price of \$600,000. The Society agreed to extend their current lease at that time until they could determine whether that was a price that would work for them. The Society then countered with \$250,000 for the Breakers, its stables, and all furniture based on recent sale prices of the estates at Mirmar and Sherwood. The heirs, who had by this time inherited the property after the death of the Countess, came back with a price of \$400,000. On November 30th, 1972, \$366,475 was decided on. The deal was made on the condition that the furniture would be separately donated to the Society so that the heirs could take a tax reduction on the donation in turn for lowering from their initial asking price substantially.⁶⁶⁵ This way the Society was able to receive the furniture without paying for it and the heirs retained money on the furniture's donation without having to separate the collection from its original home. This arrangement demonstrates that the Society was becoming more skilled and knowledgeable about tax law and how to broker property acquisitions, this new knowledge would benefit both the Society and the former property owners.

⁶⁶⁴ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, The Breakers 44 Ochre Point, December 20th, 1972, Book 237 Page 377.

⁶⁶⁵ Corcoran, Peckham, Hayes and Galvin, P.C. Attorneys and Counselors at Law. *Purchase of the Breakers*. March 18, 2015.

The year 1972 also saw the purchase of the Storer Parks properties for \$3,500. This purchase was part of the project known as the Goat Island Urban Renewal Project.⁶⁶⁶ This showed the Society's commitment to the city by buying the park and providing funds for the city, while also preserving the historic landscape and created public space. Simultaneously preserving the historic landscape and creating public space, this purchase was not a fiscal benefit to them and did not add to their mission directly.

Storer Park, the Goat Island Redevelopment plan and Hunter House are all physically connected property. The Society wanted control over this property in order to control what happened to the land immediately next to Hunter House and to protect it from building. That was why this unprofitable deal was made, to help keep Hunter House safe, while also benefitting the community.⁶⁶⁷

As the 1972 philanthropic trend continued, the Society was given another estate, Kingscote, again along with an endowment to keep the property running.⁶⁶⁸ In the same year Green Animals, the famed topiary garden outside of Newport, was given to the Society in the form of a bequest. An endowment was established for the gardens as well.⁶⁶⁹ These two properties are both still in the possession of the Preservation Society. Both were given with endowments and cost the Society no money up front and both fulfill representation of areas of history not previously covered by the Society's holdings. Kingscote is a national historic landmark renowned for its Gothic Revival Cottage Style.⁶⁷⁰ Green Animals is the Society's only property outside of Newport shown as one of their main properties and represents landscaping on a scale not previously shown by the Society.⁶⁷¹ These two properties expanded the collection and brought in money, making it feasible and logical for the Society to take them on. They still

⁶⁶⁶ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Goat Island, Book 236 page 270.

⁶⁶⁷ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, November 18, 1966.

⁶⁶⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 1973.

⁶⁶⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 1973.

⁶⁷⁰ Preservation Society of Newport County, *Kingscote*, Accessed February 20, 2019,
<https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/kingscote>

⁶⁷¹ Preservation Society of Newport County, *Green Animals*, Accessed February 20, 2019,
<https://www.newportmansions.org/explore/green-animals-topiary-garden>.

represented a financial risk as both are large properties that require a lot of upkeep, showing the stability of the Society that it was willing to take on such risk.

At the August 25th, 1970 Trustees meeting the idea was broached of the possibility for the donation of Green Animals upon the death of Alice Brayton. Ms. Brayton wished to have the gardens shown to the public and her family did not want the responsibility of caring for the gardens. Katherine Warren thought that they would eventually pay for themselves and noted that Miss Brayton gave the Society permission to sell the property should they become a financial burden.⁶⁷² To this day Green Animals does not pay for itself, but the Society maintains it. This provides insight into the importance of the site historically as it is not beneficial monetarily.

In 1973 the Society gave Storer Park back to the city with easements on the property meant to keep it as open land.⁶⁷³ Storer Park is directly next to Hunter House so the preservation of that land is essential. The Society had no real purpose for the land, so it was logical that they entrusted its upkeep to the city. Why they paid \$3,500 for it and then gave it up for nothing is less clear. The last acquisition of this year came in 1974 with land adjacent to Rosecliff being gifted to the Society by the same Rosecliff philanthropist, this was the property formerly known as By-the- Sea. This land expanded the Rosecliff property and showed that the donor had faith in the Society as he was giving so much property to them. The benefactor believed they would preserve the sanctity of the Bellevue Ave neighborhood with this addition.⁶⁷⁴ No real estate transactions happened in 1975.

1976-1979 Between Vietnam and Reagan

After the Vietnam War and before the Reagan economic era, which will be touched on later, there are the years 1976-1979, the Carter presidency. These years were characterized economically by recovery years from the war and the Nixon resignation. In this period the

⁶⁷² Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, August 25, 1970.

⁶⁷³ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Storer Park, Washington Street, Plat 16 Lot 236.

⁶⁷⁴ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, By the Sea 548 Bellevue Avenue, November 26th, 1976, Book 257 Page 1-2.

Society was selling property for profit, which they were putting at least in part back into their own budget, showing a need for money that they have not necessarily had before. During the years of Jimmy Carter from 1977-1981 the economy was unpredictable. Carter's constant struggle with stagflation would characterize this time period and his presidency as unstable.⁶⁷⁵

In 1976 the Society sold a large part of the By-the-Sea property for \$175,000, but they put restrictions on it that were detailed in Chapter Three. The constraints preserved both the view from Rosecliff and the character of the neighborhood.⁶⁷⁶ The Society had no need for the land and used the money from the sale to add to the endowment of Rosecliff. That way the money from the land would benefit the site in perpetuity and they would not have to worry about upkeep on land they did not need.⁶⁷⁷ With the economic insecurity of the age it is no wonder that they chose to add to their endowment rather than hoard land.

The Society had been subletting the Brick Market space for several years and in 1977 officially ended all leases with the space.⁶⁷⁸ Again, cutting costs where they could. They purchased 118 Mill Street in the same year for \$85,000,⁶⁷⁹ this was symbolic in two ways. It was important as it showed that the Society was expanding and had to grow into a new larger office space. It was also symbolic as it referenced Katherine Warren, the former owner of the property and longtime president of the Society, who had just recently passed. Many Newport residents and Society employees did and continue to credit Warren for the success of the Society and in large part the revival of the town.⁶⁸⁰ The idea to make her former home their new offices was in some ways also good marketing as it was another technique of showing their appreciation of history. Also, in 1977 the Society sold the Colonial house, 37 Touro for \$61,300. This

⁶⁷⁵ Andrew W Robertson, "Carter, Jimmy," In *Encyclopedia of U.S. Political History*, edited by Andrew W. Robertson, 2515-2518., Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2010.

⁶⁷⁶ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, By the Sea 548 Bellevue Avenue, November 26th, 1976, Book 257 Page 1-2.

⁶⁷⁷ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, February 1977 number 69.

⁶⁷⁸ *Newport Gazette*, Preservation Society of Newport County, May 1977 number 70.

⁶⁷⁹ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 118 Mill Street Warren House, May 2nd, 1977, Book 263 Page 227-229.

⁶⁸⁰ Alyssa Lozupone, *A Passion for Preservation: Katherine Warren and the Shaping of Modern Newport*, Newport: Commonwealth Editions, 2015.

transaction again showed their appreciation of public appearance, as they gave back the donated \$10,000 given to them for repairs of the house and its initial cost.⁶⁸¹ They owned the building outright and there was no obligation of them to pay money back to the original donors. They did so because of appearance and reputation. This again showed their commitment to the community and their willingness to be an active part of its betterment. The remainder of the sale money went into other projects the Society was managing.

The following year had no buying or selling of property, but in 1978 the Society had trouble with the local government who wanted to impose a 6% tax on museum admissions. This tax would be officially canceled by 1979 and was never enforced.⁶⁸² This was an interesting example of local government's interaction with the Society, while they were bringing in a lot of visitors the Society also owned (and still does own) massive amounts of property that were off the tax rolls due to their nonprofit status. There was clearly a push and pull in this dynamic as the Society was both economically beneficial and negative in the eyes of the local government. The Society was willing to do things for the city, as previously proven and stated, but not at a cost that would be detrimental to their mission.

The bequest of the Malbone House to the Society in 1979 showed their trusted reputation, as it was given to them specifically so that they could put covenants on it and resell it.⁶⁸³ First they would protect the house, then they would profit from it. This showed their reputation both for saving buildings, but also that they were willing to take on properties to sell in order to receive a donation. Also, in 1979 the Society sold a piece of the Breakers lot for \$9,500, purely for financial profit.⁶⁸⁴ This again was a demonstration of insecure financial times.

⁶⁸¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1978.

⁶⁸² Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1978.

⁶⁸³ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 21st, 1979.

⁶⁸⁴ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, 7 Bellevue Court, May 31, 1979, Book 291 page 786.

1980-1990 Ronald Reagan and Tax Reform

When Ronald Reagan took office in 1981 the economy had still not recovered from the Vietnam War or stagflation. Unemployment, taxes, and interest rates were all extremely high and the country had not been in a worse economic state since the Great Depression. In Reagan's 1981 Economic Recovery Tax Act the IRS reduced the expensing of depreciable property, this meant that he made more of an incentive for home ownership. The Tax Reform Act of 1986 reduced taxes.⁶⁸⁵ While Reagan's economic ideas and plan remain controversial, it is mostly agreed upon that they created tax breaks for the rich. Between 1980 and 1990 the Society was primarily selling expensive real estate that affluent people were more able to afford based on the healthier economics of the time.

In 1980 the Society sold Malbone House after having placed easements on it, described in Chapter Three, which were designed to maintain the homes' historic integrity. The new buyer paid \$37,682 on the structure, which was essentially all a donation after only owning the property for around 6 months.⁶⁸⁶ This was an example of a successful transaction and donation primarily because they were given the home to preserve and sell, which became a minor niche for the Society. The house at 90 Malbone Rd, still serves as a single-family home and was last sold in 2014 for \$1.6 million.⁶⁸⁷ While it could be argued that the home may have aesthetically fit into the Society's collection, the easement made it only eligible to be a single-family home and ruled out the potential treatment as a house museum. It was also relatively far away from their other sites and in a residential neighborhood that was mostly not on the National Register. It would have been more difficult to maintain that property as it was in an entirely separate area from other properties the Society already owned.

⁶⁸⁵ Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, *The Second American Revolution: Reagonomics*, Accessed February 20, 2019, <https://www.reaganfoundation.org/ronald-reagan/the-presidency/economic-policy/>.

⁶⁸⁶ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Malbone Hall 90 Malbone Road, January 2nd, 1979, Book 297 Page 26.

⁶⁸⁷Newport, RI, *Vision Government Solutions*, 90 Malbone Road, <http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=531>.

In 1981 the Society finally sold the White Horse Tavern and its parking lot after years of failed attempts at running it as a profitable restaurant.⁶⁸⁸ The initial intent of the Society to return the building to its original use was a dream never realized. The Society was never equipped to run a restaurant, even after they were granted the long-fought liquor license, because they did not have prior experience with restaurant management. This was an example of the Society's inability to repurpose a building beyond their expertise because they did not have experience in certain business ventures. They were capable of running a museum and selling property after protecting it, but requests outside of those ventures had yet to be proven either successful or profitable. The building is now a working tavern and was last evaluated as being worth \$935,500 in 2018.⁶⁸⁹

The sole real estate venture between 1982 and 1983 provides another example of the Society's abilities and limitations. Hopedene was given to the Society in 1982, at the bequest of Charles C. Paterson.⁶⁹⁰ Paterson originally wanted the Society to run the home as an inn.⁶⁹¹ Hypothetically its oceanfront view and proximity to their sites would have made for a profitable venture. But having learned from their experience with the Tavern, the Society sold the property instead for \$385,000 after only owning it for a few months.⁶⁹² Learning from the financial disaster that was the Tavern, the Society decided to stay within their niche and sell the property, using the funds to support their mission and not expand their range of activities.

Between 1984 and 1989 the Society was involved in no real estate transactions. In 1990 the Society acquired 7 Murray Place, which would serve as their greenhouse properties. This

⁶⁸⁸ Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, White Horse Tavern 26 Marlborough Street, August 18th, 1981, Book 304 Page 10.

⁶⁸⁹ Newport, RI, *Vision Government Solutions*, 16 Farwell Street,
<http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=3355>.

⁶⁹⁰ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Hopedene, 43 Cliff Avenue, Plat 34 Lot 1.2.

⁶⁹¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 27th, 1985.

⁶⁹² Newport Deeds Office, Property Records, Hopedene 43 Cliff Avenue, October 14th, 1983, Book 317 Page 115.

addition was a sign of growth of the organization, the organization needed to have work space to expand its programs.⁶⁹³

Mrs. John A Van Beuren and Mrs. Samuel M. V. Hamilton gifted the Greenhouses and land on Coggeshall to the Society in 1990. The property was 172,443 square feet, around 4 acres. The acreage had on it already two green houses, a potting shed and a cinder block garage that the Society could use for storage.⁶⁹⁴ These properties were intended to and still are used as space to raise plants for all of the Society's many properties.

1991-1999 The Gulf War

The Gulf War caused an indirect problem for the United States domestic economy. While typically one might expect a war itself to affect the economy in this timeline, it was actually a domestic lack of confidence that affected the economy. People feared the impending impact to the economy, so they were not spending at their normal rate to save for the looming doom that never came.⁶⁹⁵ The 1990s were considered some of the best times for economic growth in America despite this fear and perhaps because of it. This period of time was marked by prosperity.⁶⁹⁶ It was no surprise then that in this era the Society saw large donations of property and endowments. People no longer had use for these grand estates and because of the tax cuts that they stood to take it was logical to get rid of these properties. In many cases these estates were also going to large groups of relatives and the easiest way to satisfy all parties was to get rid of the properties.

Fiscal year 1991 ended with the Society's report that the organization intended to rent out their properties more, for events, as they were not making enough on admission alone.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹³ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Green House-Hill Property 7 Murray Place, Plat 37 Lots 48, 96, 97.

⁶⁹⁴ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, January 26, 1990.

⁶⁹⁵ Leonard Silk, *New York Times*, "Economic Scene; The Impact of the Gulf War," February 22, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/22/business/economic-scene-the-impact-of-the-gulf-war.html>, Marc Labonte, and Mindy Levit, CRS Report for Congress, *Financing Issues and Economic Effects of American Wars*, July 29, 2008, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL31176.pdf>.

⁶⁹⁶ Harris, Joel. *The Story of the 1990's Economy*. October 18, 2010. <https://economics21.org/html/story-1990s-economy-276.html>.

⁶⁹⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 1991.

However, in 1991 the Society purchased the Gilded Age Osgood Pell House with money given to them by the Alletta Morris McBean Trust.⁶⁹⁸ It was unlikely, based on the need for more renter income, that they would have been able to afford the Osgood Pell House were it not for the trust. The board wanted a larger office than the one they were working out of at 118 Mill St. The Osgood Pell House would serve as their next headquarters, as they outgrew the Warren House. The Osgood Pell House was also the single most expensive property purchased by far in the Society's history. Another important milestone for the Society, and the move would put their offices onto Bellevue Ave so they would be in the middle of their historic home collection.⁶⁹⁹

In 1992 and 1993 there were no new sales or acquisitions in the Society. In 1992 it was noted that the house with the most visitors was the Breakers.⁷⁰⁰ Not a surprise but perhaps a signal that the houses the Society had been adding were not necessarily making them money and they should slow down on acquisitions. Also, the house visitation figures showed that those visitors cared about their Gilded mansions more than their smaller Colonial sites.

However, in 1994, three transactions took place. The first was the addition of the warehouse at 215 Third Street. For this transaction the Society created a new 501 (c) 2 organization.⁷⁰¹ This appears to be the beginning of a new understanding of the advantage of incorporating another tax category classification. The warehouse cost the Society \$199,500 and was meant to hold all maintenance material for the houses as well as shipping material for the stores.⁷⁰² This could be seen as an appeasement technique as the debate over taxes plagued the organization from the start of their existence. This building would be serving as storage, not as a museum or educational center open to the public, so they created the opportunity for the city to tax them in this instance. This also showed the continued growth of the organization.

⁶⁹⁸ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 1991.

⁶⁹⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1993.

⁷⁰⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1993.

⁷⁰¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 16th, 1994.

⁷⁰² Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, April 22, 1994.

In this year the Society also sold the Warren house at 118 Mill St. for \$420,000.⁷⁰³ Symbolic that they chose to sell the home of their former leader after not having owned it for a very long time, but they had outgrown the space and there was no need for two headquarters. No easements had been placed on the house, but it is protected by its location in a historic district.⁷⁰⁴ The house is still currently a private home and was last evaluated in 2018 to be worth \$2,114,600.⁷⁰⁵

The property at 118 Mill Street (Warren's house) was the offices for the Society for a while and was also symbolic as it was their long-time president's home. Interestingly there is very little discussion of the reason behind its sale in the Trustee meeting minutes. Upon announcing the purchase of a new office space one board member raised the question of what would happen to 118 Mill and it was noted that the board had promised to return the building to the city tax rolls. This could explain the sale of the building though nothing further was mentioned.⁷⁰⁶ It should also be noted that in the April 23rd, 1993 Trustee minute meetings there was a note that they have been overediting the meetings and complaints were noted that important information was being left out.⁷⁰⁷ This was right around the same time as the decision was made on 118 Mill Street, and after it was first discussed. It was very possible that a larger discussion was had about the sale and it was not noted in the minutes, though this will probably never really be known for sure.

In 1994 the Society also purchased the Isaac Bell house. The Isaac Bell house faced demolition without the Society stepping in and as a McKim, Mead, and White structure the Society thought it was too architecturally significant to allow that to happen. This project was financed through both loan and donation.⁷⁰⁸ The willingness to take on debt showed the

⁷⁰³ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Warren House, 118 Mill Street, Plat 25 Lot 84.

⁷⁰⁴ City of Newport, RI, *Historic District Commission*, Accessed February 20, 2019, <http://www.cityofnewport.com/departments/zoning-inspections/historic-district-commission>.

⁷⁰⁵ Newport, RI, *Vision Government Solutions*, 118 Mill Street, <http://gis.vgsi.com/newportri/Parcel.aspx?Pid=4891>.

⁷⁰⁶ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, 1992.

⁷⁰⁷ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, April 23, 1993.

⁷⁰⁸ Newport County Chain of Title Cards. <https://www.usdpw.com/newportri/TRecordList.aspx>. Isaac Bell House, 70 Perry Street, Plat 33 Lot 25., Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1995.

importance that the Society thought the house played to the overall character and history of Newport. The house was put under their 501 (C) 2 status so they would be taxed. The Society paid some taxes to the city which they did not necessarily have to pay, as they were protected from such fees as a 501 (c) 3 organization.⁷⁰⁹ The Isaac Bell house was now and will be used as another house museum in the Society's collection. The Society had several fundraisers specifically for the Isaac Bell house, in a way that they had not done for previous homes.⁷¹⁰ This showed the significant financial burden they took on when acquiring this home, which unlike many of their other recent properties they kept on as house museum even though it did not come with an endowment. In 1995 and 1996 the largest financial concern of the Society remained fundraising for the Isaac Bell house and they neither sold, bought or were donated any other property during this time.⁷¹¹

Isaac Bell's previous owners were trying to offload the property as soon as possible for financial reasons when it came up for sale. At the May 27th, 1994 Trustee meeting a lengthy conversation about the importance of and need to buy Isaac Bell took place. The idea was that the Society would buy the home funded by a board member and then sell it to either a private owner or another organization that would be able to take care of it. It was noted that whatever they did with the house it would cost the Society substantial money with maintenance, insurance, and the inevitable repairs that come with a house of that age. The conversation of keeping the house permanently goes as such:

Mrs. Cooper asked if there is any possibility that the house could one day become one of our houses to be shown to the public. The President said that he is not sure that makes sense- he thinks we have enough houses. We can probably do more by putting the house back in private hands, by making it a 'live-in' house. The strong consensus is that we don't want to add it to our holdings permanently.⁷¹²

⁷⁰⁹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1995.

⁷¹⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 1996.

⁷¹¹ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 15th, 1995, Annual Meeting Minutes, June 20th, 1996.

⁷¹² Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, May 27, 1994.

As far as the debate continued on why they chose to save this house, it was clear that it was historically significant. While it was not meant at this time to be added to the collection, this passage from the minutes makes clearer the decision to take it on despite the fact that the home would probably drain the Society. It should also be noted that the society had in recent years struggled to pay back loans on other homes including Chateau-Sur-Mer and still decided to take on this house:

Mr. Dick said that if we acquire that property and turn it over to a third party as a tax-paying residence, there will be a restriction on it to protect it inside and out, but also to permit public access to it for a number of days a year because the interior is so important that it would be a shame if the new owner locked the doors on it. He is personally thrilled that we are moving in that direction. Historic preservation is always under financial pressure, and particularly with the budget restrictions today. This is the kind of thing that gets cut the first, and for the Preservation Society to show this kind of leadership and reaching out beyond our properties, which are well taken care of, he feels that this is an immense shot in the arm of historic preservation. He would heartily recommend us to go forward on this.⁷¹³

It was agreed by the end of the meeting that despite the costs the Society would buy the house at a price that would not exceed what they could get a loan from a Trustee for and that the property would be held under their PSNC title and thus taxed.⁷¹⁴ Of course the Society ended up keeping the house in perpetuity despite these debates and agreements that they would do just the opposite.

The last real estate transaction the Society has made to date in Newport was the donation of Chepstow in 1997. This house, unlike Isaac Bell, came with a significant endowment of \$800,000. Chepstow was the legacy of a valued member of the Society.⁷¹⁵ This home came with the largest initial endowment of any of the properties the Society would own. While the mansion's admission does not necessarily pay for itself, it came with a large endowment which pays for much of its maintenance and it was prefurnished. It costs the Society comparatively little and made it easier for them to take it on. The next years 1998 and 1999 were focused on the

⁷¹³ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, May 27, 1994.

⁷¹⁴ Trustee Board Meeting Minutes, May 27, 1994.

⁷¹⁵ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 19th, 1997.

restoration of the buildings acquired in this decade and raising money for them.⁷¹⁶ These years also brought the official recognition that many of the houses that the Society was now stewarding would never be able to pay for themselves. While important to their mission and the culture of the city, they would forever be a financial burden even if they were a wanted financial burden.⁷¹⁷ This may have played a large part in the reasoning as to why they have yet to add to their collection since Chepstow. Their number remains at 11 historic properties open to the public, seven of them being National Historic Landmarks.

2001-2007 9/11 and the Iraq War

From 2001 through 2007 the economy was on the rise. Tax cuts took place in both 2001 and 2003. Generally speaking these were good financial times for the country.⁷¹⁸ The exception to this was the effects that the tragedy of 9/11 had on the economy. The long-term economic impacts involved overseas involvement in the Iraq war, while the short-term impacts were not huge and detrimental when looking at a national economic perspective.⁷¹⁹ That being said this was a primarily detrimental time for the Society, though the country was doing well. Attendance was down, as were donations, and the Society was financially struggling in a way that they had not in years.⁷²⁰ It was not entirely clear why this was; perhaps it had to do with history museum trends of the time of decreasing visitors or perhaps people choosing to travel abroad instead of in country because of the economic stability.

The years 2000 through 2005 were a mixed bag of financial problems and positives. Attendance was falling but donations were up, The Society was becoming more nationally and internationally recognized, but their endowment was significantly too small for the amount of

⁷¹⁶ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 18th, 1998.

⁷¹⁷ Annual Meeting Minutes, June 17th, 1999.

⁷¹⁸ Aviva Aron-Dine, Richard Kogan, and Chad Stone, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, *How Robust was the 2001-2007 Economic Expansion*, August 29, 2008, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/how-robust-was-the-2001-2007-economic-expansion>.

⁷¹⁹ Adam Rose, and S. Brock Blomberg, *Total Economic Consequences of Terrorist Attacks: Insights from 9/11*, January 5, 2011.

⁷²⁰ Annual Meeting Minutes, 2001-2007.

properties they owned.⁷²¹ In the years 2006 and 2007 they had the same problems but they were even worse monetarily.⁷²² While the museums did manage to stay afloat during this difficult period certain projects had to be postponed as the emphasis was keeping what they had running and not further restoration. Part of this problem was blamed on a national decline in museum visitation.⁷²³ It was also during these years that the organization was finally given full museum accreditation.⁷²⁴ Primarily this was a symbolic change in status and classification and had minimal immediate effect on the organization as a whole. It was not surprising that during this difficult financial period the Society did not take on any further property.

2008- 2012 Great Recession

The Great Recession in 2008 created years of economic disparity in this country. Real estate markets crashed and donations in general dwindled. Fortunately, this dark time in our nation's economic past had a limited effect on the Preservation Society. In a change from the previous years, 2008 to 2012 were fiscally successful for the Society.⁷²⁵ Though the country was suffering from great economic turmoil, some house museums experienced an uptick in visitation throughout the country. Perhaps to save money, people may have been taking vacations closer to home and day trips, which would often be to historic sites and museums. The Society also benefitted from this rise in house museum tourism as their attendance was on the rise. People within the United States seemed less likely to travel abroad and more likely to travel within the country if they had means to.⁷²⁶ This would at least in part explain the relative success of the Society during a time of great economic recession. The recession itself would also make the

⁷²¹ Annual Meetings, 2000-2005.

⁷²² Annual Meetings, 2006-2007.

⁷²³ Annual Meeting, June 19, 2003.

⁷²⁴ The Preservation Society of Newport County, *AAM Grants Accreditation to the Preservation Society*, Accessed February 21, 2019, <https://www.newportmansions.org/press/press-releases/aam-grants-accreditation-to-the-preservation-society>.

⁷²⁵ Annual Meetings, 2008-2012.

⁷²⁶ Rebekah Beaulieu, "Accounting for the Past: Historic House Museums and America's Urban Midwest," Order No. 10265763, Boston University, 2017, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.cornell.edu/docview/1969995465?accountid=10267>, 25.

Society more hesitant to add to their collection, as real estate was more turbulent. It was not surprising that they had no transactions during this time period.

2012- Present

When the recession ended the economy eventually went back to a more stable state. The Preservation Society had outrun all of their challenges and remains one of the most highly visited sites in the New England Area.⁷²⁷ The last years of this study, 2012-2018, were fiscally good years for the Society.⁷²⁸ They have been focused on making their economic impact known to the city and state as shown in their 2018 economic analysis,⁷²⁹ and have not added any properties to their collection since Chepstow in 1997.⁷³⁰ This analysis showed that the Society was affected by the economic implications of the time but also by the museum trends that were happening around them which were often very different from the economic trends of the nation.

Conclusion

Chapter Four has demonstrated that the major economic factors of the country affected the Society, though not always in ways that were expected. The Preservation Society of Newport County is one example of how preservation organizations move through the complicated economics of a changing world. Having grown out of the immediate aftermath of World War II, the Society's firm footing has lasted and thrived well into the 21st century. The initial goal of the Society at their founding was to save buildings from destruction until they could find appropriate preservation-minded private owners to take care of them. When they decided to keep the Hunter house they opened it as a museum initially, with tenants taking care of it. As time progressed they saw the value of keeping the house as a museum to preserve it and also to educate the public on both preservation and Newport's history.

⁷²⁷ Annual Meeting June 15, 2000.

⁷²⁸ Annual Meetings, 2012-2018.

⁷²⁹ Place Economic. *Historic Preservation: An economic Driver, a Study of the Impacts of Historic Preservation in Rhode Island 2018.*

⁷³⁰ Place Economic. *Historic Preservation: An economic Driver, a Study of the Impacts of Historic Preservation in Rhode Island 2018.*

Doris Duke's Newport Restoration Foundation played a major role in the switch to Gilded Age mansions when she made her intentions and abilities to take over care of the Colonial buildings clear. At this point the Society was able and willing to take on the Gilded Age mansions, which were not only physically bigger structures but also more costly, showing the Society's growth and willingness to take on more preservation responsibility. Perhaps not all of their decisions were immediately profitable, but they allowed them to have the ability to succeed in the long term. Controversial decisions to keep houses, which have not ever made them any money, added to their mission and the preservation of the county as a whole.

The Society learned their limitations the hard way with the eventual sale of the White Horse Tavern and the realization that more expertise was required to maintain a restaurant business. As the Society grew wiser it also realized the importance of endowments to the longevity of a house's preservation and success. Donors became fiscally wiser, along with the Society, as some decided to donate furniture for tax benefits instead of keeping it with no place to put it because the Society would not or could not pay for it outright. The Society's public image became more important to it as well as they addressed parking issues by buying more land to create more parking space off the neighborhood streets. When the city was upset about them taking so much property off the tax rolls, they made concessions to placate the public including allowing the Isaac Bell house to be taxed for a period and the warehouse to maintain a taxed status.

The Preservation Society of Newport County illustrates that a successful preservation organization needs to take into account simultaneously historic property and museum trends, economic trends and regional values to be prosperous and to be able to maintain their mission and ideals. The Society has demonstrated that a successful nonprofit organization must be flexible in ideology and management in order to maintain longevity. By changing focus and understanding the needs of the public along with the limitations of the Society, the Preservation Society has proven that a preservation nonprofit can successfully manage extensive and sizeable properties and be fiscally stable, while preserving the historic integrity of an entire county.

CONCLUSION

The Preservation Society of Newport County has conducted many real estate transactions throughout their over seventy-year history. Some of these transactions have been profitable. Many have not been in terms of money exchanged, yet have been in other nontraditional ways such as preserving the character of the town and demonstrating their values as a positive force for preservation awareness. These buildings have cost the Society money, while also adding to their reputation as a prestigious preservation organization. The Society has saved many buildings through these acquisitions and created many donor relationships, generating positives that were not exclusively fiscal. The real estate that has been made into house museums has remained as such and continues to welcome visitors promoting their mission of preservation. The 24 homes that the Society owned at one point, but have put back onto city tax rolls, all still remain preserved properties that add to the historic character of the town regardless of whether the Society placed easements or covenants on them.

Ideology behind the saving of these structures has changed over time. In recent years these real estate acquisitions have stopped altogether, as focus has been on preserving the existing inventory. This philosophy neither adds to nor distracts resources away from the preservation mission. The Preservation Society of Newport County now maintains 11 historic sites for the public and has no intention of adding to or selling any of these properties in the near future. Though not all of these properties make money, and some regularly cost the Society money, they are still considered to be an integral part of the organization. They have no interest in divesting any of the houses. Their mission is to present a story of Newport's past and they maintain these properties to do so. Not all houses are presented the same or maintain equal levels of popularity. The Breakers is extensively interpreted and decorated with original furnishings while the Isaac Bell House is essentially devoid of furniture and less popular to visitors. Despite

the discrepancies in visitation the commitment to the two sites and all the others remains equal as they strive to preserve all of their homes.

This history in Newport has the potential to teach other non-profits the benefits and drawbacks of engaging in multiple real estate transactions within the community that the non-profit is serving. Most of these transactions would not be available to a nonprofit without first having wealthy donors who were able to support the buildings while they are being held by the organization. If funding is available this thesis shows that the end result can have a great effect on the town's economy and the preservation of the city as a whole.

Also noted is the way in which the world's trends effect these decisions. When people find that they are not able to support their historic houses, or that their heirs cannot afford them, preservation societies have the ability to support the historical architecture and people by taking over the homes. Circumstances connected to the greater American economy play a huge role in these interactions. Under circumstances that are beneficial to both the societies and the donors or sellers the entire community has the potential to profit both financially and historically from these interactions for the long term.

When the Society was initially founded their purpose was to save the Hunter House. Then their focus was the protection of the Colonial structures in Newport County, which no one else was looking after and were facing immediate loss of structural security. The initial goal was not to create a house museum from the Hunter House but to save it from being disassembled and sent to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. From this initial goal the Society grew and began adding and therefore saving many Colonial structures which have since been put back mostly into private hands. As the Society grew and changed so too did their goals and they became known for their preservation of Gilded Age Mansions. Through necessity and opportunity their focus changed with the need for immediate intervention at the Elms.

Doris Duke was interested in maintaining the Colonial buildings, as she saw it as a way of protecting her home city. She founded the Newport Restoration Foundation to combat this challenge; many Colonial buildings fell under her care so the Society could focus their efforts

elsewhere. The Elms needed immediate attention forcing the Society to step in and changed their trajectory to focus on the mansions of Gilded Age Newport. The Elms became a symbolic purchase, as whether or not it was initially intended, the Society would permanently change their focus and mission after the acquisition of this building. After the Elms the Society moved forward with their efforts to save many of the mansions in Newport and reframe their mission specifically around the Gilded Age. In the end it would take the cooperation of two preservation-oriented bodies and other preservation associated organizations to protect all the historic houses in Newport and create the pristinely preserved city that stands today. Along with Doris Duke and the Newport Restoration Foundation, there was also Salve Regina and the Newport Historical Society who were working to preserve the historic buildings in Newport. There were also many individuals who were preserving buildings throughout the county on their own. These collaborating forces made it possible, along with the Society, for the county to be as preserved as it is today. Often times these groups or individuals worked alongside the Society each helping the others to preserve different buildings and periods of history.

The motives behind why the Society became the owners of each house varied, but behind them all was the focus on preserving the character of the city. The outcome was the creation of the new economic base of heritage tourism from which the city could revive itself and survive through the economic turns that were to come. Hunter House, Pitts Head Tavern, The White Horse Tavern, the Rogers House, 81 Second Street, Marble House, Thames and Cross Street Park, 31 Walnut Street, Chateau-Sur-Mer, The Breakers, 118 Mill Street, 7 Murray Place, the Osgood Pell House, 215 Third Street Warehouse, and the Isaac Bell House were all purchased. Rovensky Park, 30 Thames Street, the Auton House, the Malbone Estate, Rosecliff, Green Animals, Hopedene, and Kingscote were all donations. Many of the purchased properties were done with the help of financial contributions from Newport donors and also people from wealthy families specifically connected to each house. There were many more purchases than donations, showing the Society's commitment to the town's preservation despite the potentially negative implications to the organization's bottom line. The complex history of the Society is not today

known by many of the residents, some believe that the Society was just handed all the property that it now owns and are unaware of the risks and financial investment undertaken by the Society for the city.

While the initial idea was not to create house museums but to preserve historic buildings, that is today what the Society is known for. The Hunter House was their first museum, but that was intended as a temporary fix not a permanent solution. They owned both the Elms and Marble House before they owned the Breakers, but it was once they owned the Breakers outright that their position as a house museum Society for Gilded Age Mansions was fully recognized. At this point, in 1972, they had five estates that they would be able to show the public, ranging over two hundred years of history. While many of their purchases in the future were also not intended to become house museums, many ended up as such. Isaac Bell, for example, became a house museum accidentally. The house was saved by the Society at the last moment before its demolition. Their initial intention was to find a private buyer for the house who would maintain it. Upon realizing its historic significance and what it would bring to the Society's collection, and realizing that a private owner could close it to the public and change much of it without the consent of the Society, it was decided that they would keep it and add it to their collection of house museums.

Isaac Bell, The Elms, and The Breakers were all protected by the Society rather than allowing private developers to accumulate them and knock them down destroying the city's history and replacing it with new developments. In some ways the actions of others really influenced how the Society made their acquisitions as they were forced to react quickly to other individuals' plans of demolition. Had it not been for these proposed demolitions, at least, the Isaac Bell House and The Elms would not have been on the Society's radar to save and subsequently owned as current house museums and part of the collection of homes under their protection.

Perhaps their greatest lesson in real estate transactions came after one of their earliest endeavors. The White Horse Tavern, a building whose preservation was one of their missions to

save from their very first meeting, would cause them nothing but problems. At one point they were going to sell the Hunter House so that they could buy the White Horse Tavern and run it as a restaurant. While they never sold the Hunter House, they did attempt to run the White Horse Tavern as a restaurant. No one in the Society had a background in restaurant management or hospitality and the Tavern was always running at a loss and searching for new ways and management to make money. Several failed attempts at revival eventually led them to sell the Tavern, with an easement in the deal that the property always be run as a restaurant. From this the board learned to only take on projects where they had experience and expertise. The lesson in all of this, which they took forward into other purchases, was that they were unable to merely take on any property for any purpose. The Society made that clear when a donor wanted to add Hopedene to their collection to have it made into a hotel by the organization. The Society agreed to take on the building, but only to resell it after coming to the realization that they were meant to own properties as offices, museums, and investments, nothing else. This lesson they still take forward with them to the present day. For the Society these were the only ways to make preserved houses economically sustainable.

As the Society grew it also became more selective, houses were purchased that were not intended to be maintained by the Society in perpetuity. Over time they realized that covenants and easements could help protect a property that they could not afford to own or simply did not wish to own forever. For example: the easements put on the White Horse Tavern protect it from change, sale to people who would not see it preserved or used as anything other than a Tavern. In doing this they saved properties that they sold and put into the hands of people that they knew would protect it. In many cases they also had clauses in their deals that should the new owners wish to sell the houses they would first have to offer the home back to the Society at a price which would not be lower for other buyers or set too unrealistically high. They, by doing this, also secured significant homes from demolition from the following generations of buyers in the city.

It wasn't just the Society that changed their buying practices, the sellers over time too learned that they too could benefit from tax strategies. The sellers of the Breakers wanted substantially more than the Society was able to give them, so the owners decided to donate their furniture and get a tax break on that instead of selling it. That way the Society got the furniture and the donors did not have to lose out on the sale altogether. Tax planning became another benefit of the Society becoming an established nonprofit. Charitable donations became a way for the benefactors to donate to the Society while also taking charitable deductions on their taxes making them more appealing. Similarly, the Marble House furniture was on permanent loan to the Society. They could not afford it at the time of the building's purchase, but they still get the benefit of its presence in the building and the owners still maintained the valuable pieces while having someone to steward them safely.

Institutional memory is a frequent theme within the research of this thesis. Institutional memory, not just within the Preservation Society but also in the city, is a frequent discussion point. While the CEO of the Preservation Society has been there for many years, as have many of the higher-ups in the organization, there are also many members who do not have long tenures and who are unaware of any of the history discussed in this thesis. Some of the current staff members are unacquainted with this history. There are also gaps in data in the city's records. Some houses were much harder to track down than others. The hardest of which was Pitts Head Tavern, and when speaking to city officials they were unaware of its presence, history, or movement to another site. Its eventual discovery was due to a small hand-written note found in an unrelated record which led to the understanding of its movements. This lack of institutional knowledge led to the need to be extremely specific and diligent in some searches that involved looking in archival records that probably have not been looked at by many since they were first filed away. Trudy Coxe, the CEO of the Society, has made it part of her job to understand the history of the Society, this history included. There is also longtime lawyer William Corcoran, who was a fountain of knowledge of past events including many discussed within this text. Terry Dickinson has been with the Society for years as well and was able to provide locations for

finding many of the missing answers. Unfortunately, knowledgeable individuals are not enough to remember such histories forever, as memories fade, but speaking with them has been an extremely valuable part of this research. Luckily the Society understands these concerns and is currently in the process of writing an institutional history which Coxe believes will fill in whatever gaps there may be for both the staff and people interested in the organization's history.⁷³¹

The Society is primarily uninterested in taking on more properties. According to Coxe and Dickinson they can never see themselves selling any of their current properties (though offers have been made) and think there is almost no chance of them taking a new one on. Ideas and offers have come their way and interest made clear, but no deals have been made in recent years. After pushing for an exception Coxe acknowledged that a truly exceptional house with a large endowment would hypothetically be added to their collection but the prospects seem very unlikely. It would have been easier to accept the original answer of probably not, as at least in the near future it seems that it will not be happening. The days of real estate transactions in Newport are probably over for the Society, but they also recently owned a piece of property in Utah for less than a day. A donor gave them the land, which they took only after finding an immediate buyer and then sold that day so that they could benefit from the money made off of the land sale and never have to actually deal with owning land in Utah. The view point of the Society has changed many times over their history, and while it is safe to say that it is very unlikely that they would sell any of their current properties, it is more hypothetically likely in the right economic and fiscal circumstances that they would take another one on perhaps at some point.

Conflicting with that is the current and ever-present push against the Society and the belief that they should be paying more taxes to the city then they currently are as a nonprofit. As seen throughout this thesis the Preservation Society and the City of Newport had multiple

⁷³¹ Interview with Trudy Coxe CEO and Executive Director of the Preservation Society of Newport County.

conversations, debates, and compromises concerning the tax burden borne by the Society. When the Society purchased the Isaac Bell house, they made a point of letting it be a taxed property until they made it a museum open to the public. Real estate transactions happening between the city and the Society show both partnership and contention at the same time as tax tensions exist. As recently as 2013 a local Newport newspaper published a discussion on whether or not the Preservation Society should pay into the unanimously passed PILOT program (payment in lieu of taxes). At that time, it was calculated that the Society owned \$121.3 million in property and would therefore owe \$1.42 million in taxes per year if it were not tax exempt and the PILOT program was an attempt to get some of that money back into the city.⁷³² The Society argued that they pay into the economy by providing substantial tourist dollars. As Head of Museum Experience John Rodman says in the article “forcing the Preservation Society to pay a payment in lieu of taxes, or PILOT – ‘which is really a tax,’” he said -- would be counterproductive for the city’s economy because that money no longer would serve as an economic multiplier for the city as a whole.”⁷³³ Newport’s struggle to recognize the positive economic impact the Society has on the city continues today. On March 28th, 2019 an article in the same local paper reported that the City is looking to tax any non-profit that sells more than 20,000 tickets a year. With their past year’s visitation reaching 1 million visitors this tax is directly aimed at the Society and is another way of trying to tax the tax-exempt organization.⁷³⁴ At the same time that this is happening, the Society finds itself in a place where they are in need of all of their resources. As of April 1st, 2019, they are trying to raise \$4.2 million for needed immediate repairs of their

⁷³² Flynn, Sean. NewportRI.com. *Paying Their Fair Share?* October 15, 2013. <https://www.newportri.com/article/20131015/ENTERTAINMENT/310159859>.

⁷³³ Flynn, Sean. NewportRI.com. *Paying Their Fair Share?* October 15, 2013. <https://www.newportri.com/article/20131015/ENTERTAINMENT/310159859>.

⁷³⁴ Flynn, Sean. NewportRI.com. *Want to buy a Home in Newport? You May Have to Pay an Extra Tax in the Future.* March 28, 2019. <https://www.newportri.com/news/20190328/want-to-buy-home-in-newport-you-may-have-to-pay-extra-tax-in-future>.

mansions, the most pressing of which being two of their most prestigious sites: Rosecliff and Marble House.⁷³⁵

Taxes and economic changes play a large part in the Society's real estate behavior, but not always as one might anticipate. Though the Society wanted the White Horse Tavern to be run as a restaurant, it was an economic drain, not necessarily because the business couldn't succeed, as it does now in the same form, but because they had no experience in managing such an endeavor. Certain policies, like Reagan's on taxes, affected the Society the way that one might think. More people were taking his offered tax breaks and unloading their property. This economic policy the Preservation Society benefited from, like many other nationwide policies, while other economic influences have created unintended consequences. The Great Recession of 2008 was a time when more people were visiting the Society, an outcome that might not be expected based on the general economic wellbeing decline in the country.

From this thesis many more research projects have the opportunity to grow. A future research project emanating from this thesis would be looking into all easements and covenants that the Preservation Society has made and understanding how those were affected by and affected the economy. While this discussion was addressed here, a future thesis focused on these interactions would be beneficial and create a comprehensive look at the Society's changing policies and mindset in this area. Understanding the role that easements played on the economic wellbeing of historic districts would be a logical next step. Another option for continuing this study would be to conduct the same research, but this time on the Newport Restoration Foundation. The Restoration Foundation, like the Preservation Society, has had a profound impact on Newport in similar ways with a different mission. Instead of focusing on house museums, the Restoration Foundation rents out many of their properties and places preservation responsibility on the renters while they maintain the spaces. Similar in many ways, their mission is different. The Foundation owns some museums, but primarily rent out their property so their

⁷³⁵ Thatcher, Rachel. NewportRI.com. *Preservation Society: Mansions need \$4.2 million in immediate repairs.* April 1, 2019. <https://www.newportri.com/news/20190401/preservation-society-mansions-need-42-million-in-immediate-repairs>.

impact on the town's economy would be different. Comparing the activities of the two organization's real estate interactions would also be an interesting juxtaposition of how the economic factors influenced each entity.

There would also be room for a future research paper on this same topic but looking at it from a different lens, such as the citizens who live in the surrounding properties who are affected by the tourism and these properties going off the tax rolls, or the local governments outlook on the situation. As noted in the introduction this thesis is about the topic looking from the Societies perspective, so analysis from other perspectives could be enlightening. That research may even show some conflicted history and stands to be informative on this research in one way or another.

Another area worth researching would be the effect that these preserved structures have on local property taxes. Is taking buildings off the tax role taking tax money away from public works and causing a rise in taxation for people living in the area? What effect that has on the city would be an area worth covering. There are also estate and inheritance taxes that were mentioned in this thesis but could be covered in another by looking specifically at how much inheritance was saved by having properties donated to the Society and how much the county lost by not collecting those taxes. While many of these topics were touched upon in this work there are many other research questions that could stem off of this one and further this study. What has been covered has been sufficient for one thesis, but many others have the potential to grow from this research.

Newport is set apart from the other organizations mentioned in this thesis (Biltmore, Hearst Castle, and Vizcaya) by their range of history and buildings. These other three case studies are single properties and while they may offer different tours within the properties, they each have one history. The Preservation Society offers several tours spanning several time periods which gives visitors the ability to visit numerous time periods and see something different every time. The Society also offers tours focused on different topics such as tours focused on servants' lives at the Breakers. This ability to offer different tours in different

locations has much to do with their real estate transactions. Without these movements they would not have ended up with many of these houses. This growth of inventory, though more expensive to maintain, also offers more experiences and options for guests that other sites cannot offer in one place.

This thesis has shown that nationwide economics play a great role in the real estate transactions of nonprofits, though not always in the way one might expect. The Preservation Society of Newport County has weathered many economic storms and their real estate transactions have helped the city keep its preservation character as well as its economic health. Overall, they have been a positive force for change in the city and its legacy. While the Society's specific motives have changed, the basis for them has always been clear. Preserve the City's historic buildings and make sure the economy of the city is strong and sustainable. The large quantity of transactions that have taken place in the Newport Society may not be available for all nonprofits, the size of this nonprofit makes these efforts easier. If a nonprofit can interact with a city in the way that this Society has, it has the potential to make for great preservation and economic strength for both the nonprofit and the city. This option of course is only available with donors who are willing to support these endeavors and employees who are passionate about the projects. Luckily The Preservation Society of Newport County had these assets and was able to use them to fundamentally alter the character of the city economically and save it physically. The Preservation Society of Newport County successfully preserved centuries of history and architecture for generations to come.

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