

# YE A R B O O K

ODE ISLAND, CRADLE OF LIBERTY AND LAND OF PROMISE



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 and Tom"  
 History Section  
 The 18th Century





*The Breakers, most famous of the Newport estates.*

**N**EWPORT, LIKE Caesar's Gaul, is divided into three parts: . . . the natives, the Navy and the summer colonists.

Yet each has contributed to the fame which has made it internationally known.

Founded in 1638, it grew from a farming and fishing center to a great seaport only to lose out to New York after the American Revolution.

## THE NEWPORT STORY

BY GARDNER DUNTON

For 64 years after the Royal Charter was granted by Charles II in 1663 the Governors of Rhode Island were all Newporters beginning with Benedict Arnold, who served two later terms and died in office as did William Coddington. William Coddington, Jr. was Governor from 1683 to 1685, and it was not until Samuel Cranston, Governor for 29 years, died in office and was replaced by Joseph Jencks in 1727 that a Providence man headed the Colonial government. Thereafter, three more Newporters served as Governor until 1743. Six more Newport men served at various times as Governor until the adoption of the Constitution in 1842. In 123 years since its adoption only four Newport residents have sat in the Governor's chair. William H. Vanderbilt, the fifth from the Island of Rhode Island to be Governor, resided in Portsmouth.

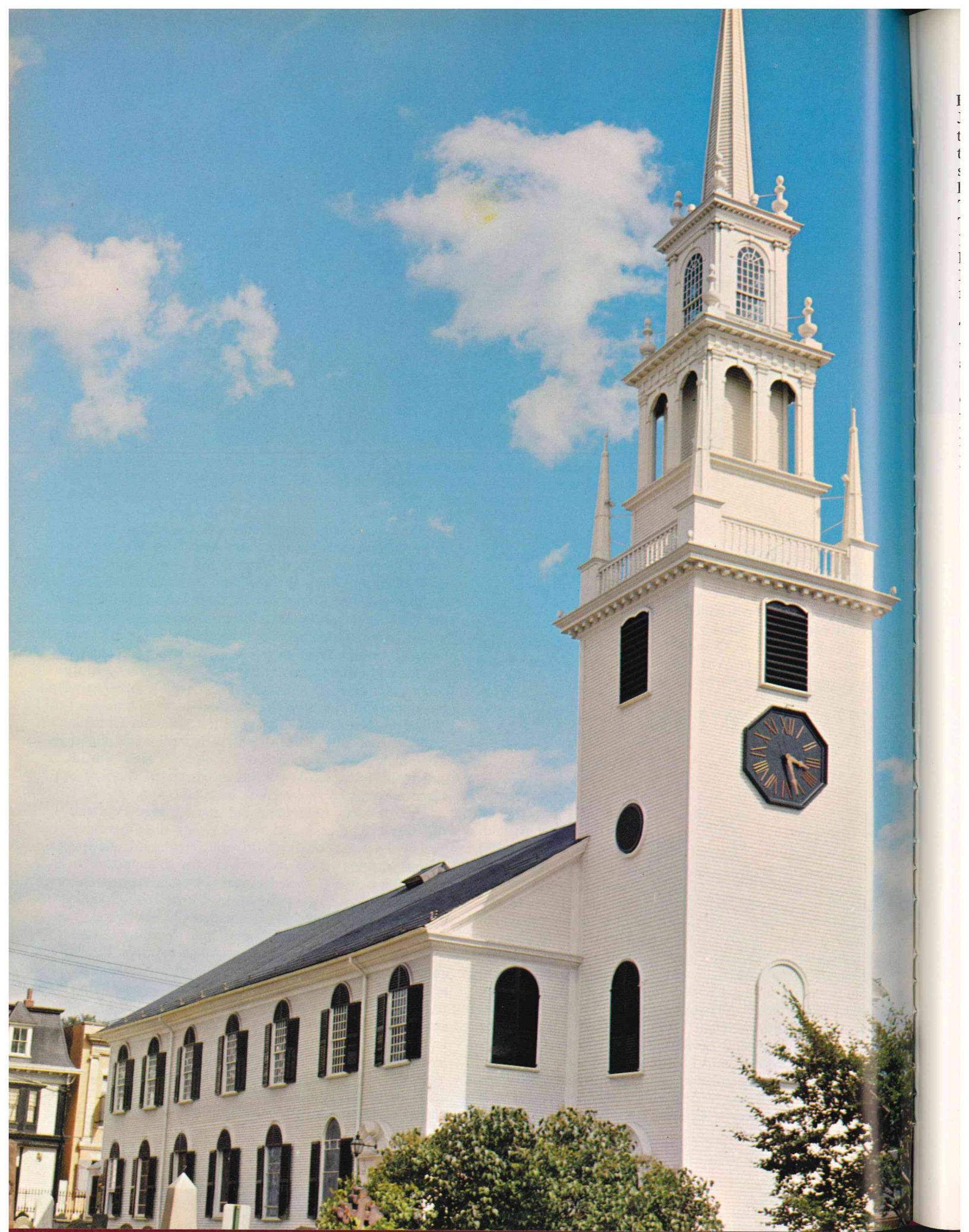
Its 18th century era was one of great ships and merchant princes whose vessels sailed the seven seas and brought them great wealth by 18th century standards.

Many were the merchants of distinction in 18th century Newport. Among them was John Wanton, the son of Governor Gideon Wanton and of the same family as William and John Wanton who merited and received the thanks of the Colony and of Queen Anne for ridding the coast of a pirate, and Joseph Wanton, all three of whom were Governors of the Colony. John's son, Gideon, gave promise of being the most acute trader of the family. After a promising and precocious youthful career, he died at the age of twenty. Another great merchant was Henry Wilkinson and there are names in 18th century records of many others; William Channing and George Gibbs, Christopher Champlin and George Champlin, James and John Robinson, Caleb Gardner and many others, some of whom organized the first insurance company in Newport in 1799.

These natives built imposing houses, many of which still stand. The crafts flourished under their patronage. Today the work of Goddard and Townsend, Newport cabinet makers of Colonial times, are collectors' items, as are the works of such Newport silversmiths as Samuel Vernon; Daniel Rogers; Jonathan Clark; John Coddington; Arnold Collins, who, incidentally, designed the State seal of Rhode Island, and Isaac Anthony.

Many men were responsible for Newport's days of eminence. There was Dr. Isaac Center, a physician and scholar of great note. There was Dr. Stiles, appointed pastor of the First Congregational Church in 1755, a scholar and friend of Benjamin Franklin. He was named Librarian of the Redwood Library and was given a D.D. by the University of Edinburgh and became President of Yale University. There was William Vernon, a man of great influence and knowledge of marine affairs who played an important role in establishing a Navy, the first







President of the Redwood Library and a close friend of John Adams, Benjamin Franklin and other patriots of the times. There was Judge Robert Lightfoot who came to Newport from England in 1716 for his health and spent the rest of his life in America. He was an eminent lawyer and jurist, a classical scholar and a great epicure. There was the Reverend James Honyman, Rector of Trinity Church as early as 1704. There was Nathaniel Kay, Collector of the King's Customs, who at his death handsomely endowed Trinity Church. There was William E. Channing, one of the early Attorneys General and a member of the Continental Congress.

Near Honyman's Hill, named for the great Rector of Trinity Church, is Whitehall, where Dean Berkeley, whom Honyman had induced to visit Newport, lived and wrote some of his finest philosophical works.

And Colonial Newport was not lacking in art, in spite of her devotion to trade and shipping. Smibert painted there and it is probable that his portrait of Bishop Berkeley, now at Yale University, was painted at Whitehall. Samuel King painted portraits in Newport and was the first instructor of Malbone and Allston. Gilbert Stuart made Newport his home and his daughter, Jane Stuart, an artist of great skill also lived here. Charles B. King later of Washington always claimed Newport as his home and R. M. Staigg, whose miniatures were and still are highly prized, lived and worked in Newport.

The British occupation of Newport in 1778 set the city back and the Colonial era of prosperity had come to a standstill as the 18th century ended.

From then on, Newport developed as a summer resort and still later as a Naval center. Today it has become a mecca for tourists coming to view the priceless heritage that is Newport's alone.

These include the 200 year old historic buildings such as Redwood Library (1748); The Colony House or Old State House (1739) and Touro Synagogue (1759) all three now official U. S. National Historic Shrines. There are the famous Colonial homes and churches, Trinity Church (1729) the old Quaker Meeting House (1699) and of much later vintage, the palaces of the Gay Nineties multi-millionaires.

The summer visits of President Eisenhower and President Kennedy as well as the Newport Jazz and Folk Festivals of the past decade have all added to the attractions which Newport has for the tourist.

Another attraction which is luring visitors to Newport is the America's Cup races of recent years, the next of which will be held in 1967 between the Australian challenger and the American defender.

The Newport Development Agency, aided by Federal funds, is transforming the harbor waterfront and the down town business area by removing old buildings and creating a waterfront park with nearby marinas and motels. It is also constructing a causeway to Goat Island, long the site of the old Torpedo Station which is now being cleared preparatory to the construction of a modern hotel and yachting marinas by a private corporation



*Whitehall — Residence of Dean Berkeley*

which has leased it from the city.

Time was when visitors would view the Old Stone Tower, Newport's own trademark whose origin is still a mystery. Some say it was built by the Vikings in the 12th century, others believe it to be Benedict Arnold's 18th century windmill and granary.

Visitors could also tour the nine mile Ocean Drive or walk the famous three mile Cliff Walk along the Atlantic Ocean, whence they could view the luxurious summer estates from the distance and wonder how the other half lived.

Today they not only enjoy the above features but actually see the interior of the more lavish of these millionaire summer "cottages" as they were called by their owners 70 years ago.

Newport's heritage not only of Colonial days, but of its 19th century Golden Age is being preserved for posterity by the Preservation Society of Newport County.

Organized in 1948 to restore and open to the public the 18th century Hunter House as a museum, it soon, through the courtesy of the then owner, the late Countess Laszlo Szechenyi acquired by lease, the famous Vanderbilt palace, The Breakers.

Since the Countess, who was the former Gladys Vanderbilt, daughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt who built it, leased it to the Preservation Society at one dollar a year, more than three quarters of a million persons have viewed its interior. It is by far the most popular tourist attraction in Newport.

Also open to visitors is The Breakers Stable with the original Vanderbilt carriages and harnesses; Marble House, the ten million dollar palace built by W. K. Vanderbilt in 1892 and The Elms, the French chateau-style palace with its sunken gardens, built for E. J. Berwind, the coal magnate, in 1901.

The past year has seen "Operation Clapboard" get under way in Newport which is promoting the purchase of old Colonial homes in the upper Thames Street section and renovating them to their Colonial beauty.

Another museum of the past is Belcourt Castle, where O. H. P. Belmont once kept his family and his horses under one roof, the mansion being built with two large wings.

One of the most farsighted moves Newport ever made was in presenting Coaster's Harbor Island, for a century



the site of the city's poor house and asylum, to the U. S. Government in 1881 for the use of the U. S. Navy.

Two years later it became the Naval Training Station, where, up to and including World War II, thousands of blue jackets received their "boot" training. In 1884 the Naval War College was established on the southwest corner of the island. Today it graduates some 200 officers of the Armed Forces plus some 30 allied foreign officers annually.

World War II saw the gradual development of the present Naval Base which included not only Coaster's Harbor Island but the shore for eight miles north into Portsmouth.

Here are located the Fleet Training Center, the Officer Training Corps which converts college graduates and Navy enlisted personnel into Naval officers in a three months' course.

Here also are located two large piers to which moor the ships of the Atlantic Fleet Cruiser Destroyer Force; a Naval Supply Depot to outfit the fleet in all branches; a fuel depot; a U. S. Marine contingent for guard duty; and the Naval Underwater Ordnance Station, which carries on testing and experimental work in the development of submarine warfare and torpedoes. These and numerous other facilities make up the Base. Coming this fall

is the establishment of a submarine base for atomic submarines at Melville, the north end of the Base which was a PT boat school and net depot during the last war.

Newport's third facet, its unique position as a summer resort, which did more to make it world famous may be said to date back to 1729, when planters from the West Indies sailed up to enjoy the cooling summer breezes.

Word of Newport's "salubrious climate," as a Colonial doctor described it, began to spread.

The West Indian planters, whose annual arrivals began to be noted in the Newport Mercury in 1767 continued to summer in Newport up through the Revolution.

Their listing in the Mercury, the country's oldest newspaper, founded by James Franklin, brother of Benjamin, in the early 18th century, might be termed the forerunner of the "society columns" which were to chronicle Newport's summer life in the New York papers more than a hundred years later.

As the 19th century got under way, a new group of summer residents appeared. These were the Southern plantation owners from the Carolinas and Virginia, who brought their families up by coach along with their retinues of servants. They continued coming until the Civil War.

By now, a few from Boston, New York and Philadelphia whose numbers increased in the post war period were finding Newport a pleasant summering place. They built comfortable but unpretentious homes in what is now the main residential section of Newport as well as on some sections of Bellevue Avenue. Many stayed in hotels and private rooming houses.

Well-to-do and cultured, they joined with the leading Newport residents in a social life, and the visitors included many intellectuals of that era.

In 1852, some of these founded the Newport Reading Room as a social and literary club for men only. Later they admitted summer colonists, who eventually took over. Today it is the oldest "gentlemen's club" in the country still occupying its original building.

Almost as exclusive as a hundred years ago, it once a year admits ladies for an afternoon and its club register includes such names as Charles Dickens, Marshall Petain and Edward, as the Duke of Windsor signed his name in 1945.

Back in 1836 one William Beech Lawrence purchased 69 acres of farmland located between Bellevue Avenue and the Cliffs for \$12,000. Today it would more likely cost twelve million dollars.

He established an estate which he named Ochre Court because of the color of the nearby cliff formation.

This eventually became known as Ochre Point and was to become the most exclusive section of Newport.

Shortly after the Civil War another farmland owner in the neighboring vicinity, one Alfred Smith started selling off his lands for house lots to wealthy summer colonists.

In 1877, Lawrence sold eleven of his Ochre Point acres to Pierre Lorillard, the tobacco magnate, who in turn sold his estate to Cornelius Vanderbilt, the grandson of the Commodore who started the family fortune in 1885.

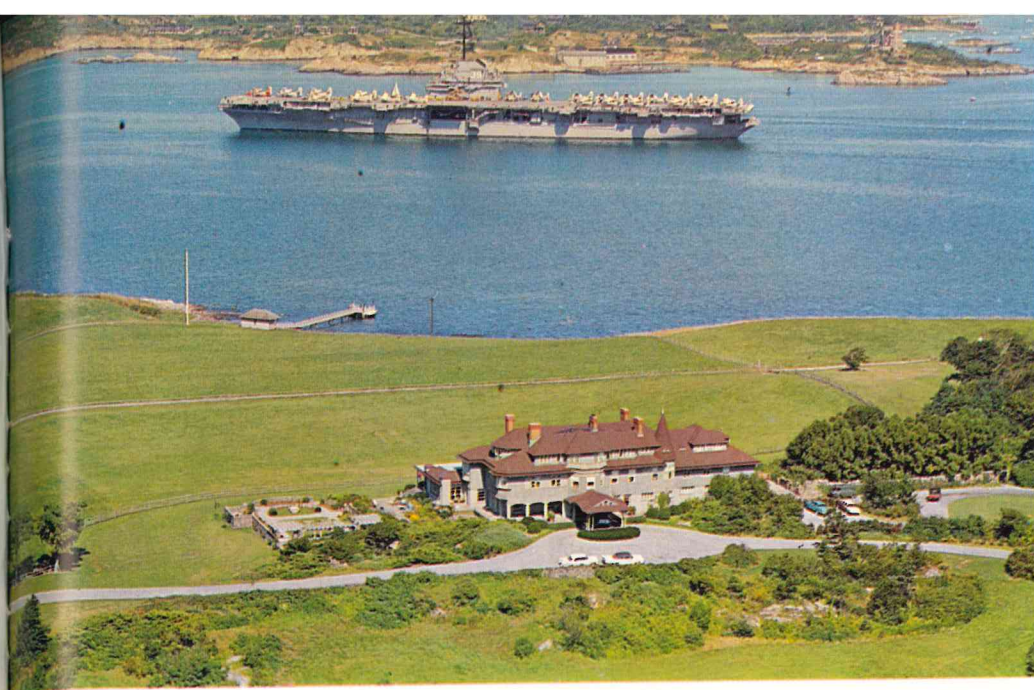
That year Ogden Goelet, one of the early Newport capitalists had built Ochre Court, designed by Richard Hunt along the lines of a French chateau, perhaps one of the most beautiful of the Newport palaces. Fifty years later, Ogden's son, Robert, gave it away to become Salve Regina College, the first Catholic Women's college in Rhode Island.

Already James J. Van Alen, another New York millionaire, had built "Wakehurst" modelled after an English baronial manor, and W. K. Vanderbilt had built "Marble House" on Bellevue avenue.



*The fabulous Gardens of Marble House*





*Hammersmith Farm, one time residence of President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy. A flattop negotiates the East Passage.*

Newport's Golden Age was under way and a new plutocracy which Ward Macallister, a New York Cotillion leader dubbed the "400" was on the march in Newport.

Cornelius Vanderbilt and his family were still living in the wooden cottage he had purchased from Lorillard when in 1892 it was destroyed by fire.

Vanderbilt retained Richard Hunt to design something that would outshine Ochre Court, where Mrs. Vanderbilt's sister, Mrs. Goelet lived.

The result was the 52 room stone palace modelled after an Italian villa. It was reputed to cost two million dollars with another seven millions spent for furnishings.

"The Breakers" henceforth became the headquarters of Newport Society as long as Mrs. Vanderbilt lived, for some years previous she had challenged Mrs. William Astor in New York for social supremacy and won out.

Here the Vanderbilts "brought out" their daughters with lavish balls and entertained on a grand scale for many years.

Already the Belmonts and Astors had joined the colony as had the Havemeyers, Stuart Duncan, Edward Morgan, Nicholas Brown, all of whose names became synonymous with the magnificent estates rivalled only by those in Europe.

The so called "400" Society with its multi millions was a closed corporation based on inherited wealth and family largely centered in New York City.

Its doings were given columns in the press and not until a new "Cafe Society" had taken over, did the Newport Society founded in the Gay Nineties dwindle.

Already James Gordon Bennett, August Belmont, Pierre Lorillard had in 1880 founded the Newport Casino, which was to become the center of the tennis world until Forest Hills took over in 1915.

Not only was the Casino the center of tennis, where its August tennis week was and still is the peak of the Newport season with its many balls and parties, but it was the daily gathering place of Society until the 1930's.

Until 1904, the gold and white cotillion room designed by Stanford White was another social center at the Casino. It was converted into a summer theater in 1927 by a group of summer colonists and plays were given there annually until 1961.

Besides coming out parties which would cost proud fathers upward of \$100,000, the summer colonists found plenty to do with their horses and yachts.

Debutante parties would call for outdoor pavilions, Japanese lanterns in the trees, at least two orchestras, champagne and midnight suppers as well as favors for men and women, often expensive jewelry.

In 1893 Theodore A. Havemeyer, Lorillard Spencer, H. Mortimer Brooks and George P. Wetmore founded the Newport Country Club where the summer colonists could play golf. For many years it had a limited membership, the only outsiders allowed to play being the guests of the members, or those leading country club players of the east coast invited for the annual tournament.

In the early days of the colony, the members were wont to drive down to Joe Bailey's beach at the end of Bellevue avenue for a swim.

In 1897 Robert Goelet, A. C. Taylor and I. Townsend Burden organized the Spouting Rock Beach Association and bought Bailey's Beach, as it is commonly known, for the exclusive use of the summer colony. Deeds to the Bellevue avenue estates contained a clause entitling the owner to "drive and maintain a bathing cart on Bailey's Beach."

Called the most exclusive bathing beach in the world, where legend has it that a member was ostracized for mentioning common stocks, it is perhaps the last bastion of the old Newport social summer colony. It is as difficult to get into today as it was 50 years ago and its several formal dances each summer are a tradition in Newport.

Today Bailey's Beach is the social center of what is left of Newport's colony. Members gather daily for a swim and luncheon and the younger set finds the tennis courts more convenient than the Casino.



Also in 1897 a group of the older Newporters who preceded the Vanderbilt-Goelet-Astor era, founded the Clambake Club on Easton's Point, Middletown where men could gather for stag parties and skeet shooting.

Eventually the men of the social summer colony were admitted to membership and as happened with the Reading Room, the latter had taken over the club within two decades.

Today it is the principal place for the summer colonists to dine out and entertain with dinner parties for anywhere from ten to fifty guests.

Newport's Golden Age continued unparalleled through the turn of the century. Recently one of the last of her era recalled that, "there were ten debutante balls in Newport the summer I came out in 1902."

Besides tennis and golf, the summer colony found pleasure and competition in their horses and flowers. From 1898 to 1927 the Casino was the scene of the annual Newport Horseshow, one of the leading events of its kind.

Another feature held annually at the Casino, were the flower shows. The gardens of Newport estates were

famous and nearly every one had a greenhouse wherein were raised not only the garden plants but hot house grapes and melons, camellias, fuschia and orchids. Another phase of Newport's Golden age were the private yachts, used as much for entertaining at lunches and dinners as for cruising.

Now but a memory are such floating palaces as Arthur Curtiss James' three masted barkentine, "Aloha;" J. P. Morgan's "Corsair;" Henry A. C. Taylor's "Wanderer;" George E. Widener's "Josephine;" George E. Baker's "Diana;" August Belmont's "Scout," on which he took a party of 50 to see the Cape Cod Canal opened in 1914; Henry Walter's "Narada;" Vincent Astor's "Noma," and after World War I, "Nourmahal;" Cornelius Vanderbilt's "North Star" and later his son Gen. Cornelius Vanderbilt's "Winchester," which resembled a sleek destroyer.

Some were loaned to the government during World War I and what were left by 1940 were given outright to the government in World War II which saw the last of the great Newport yachts.

The year 1914 may be said to be the beginning of the end for Newport's Golden Age, for the automobile was replacing the horse as a means of transportation.

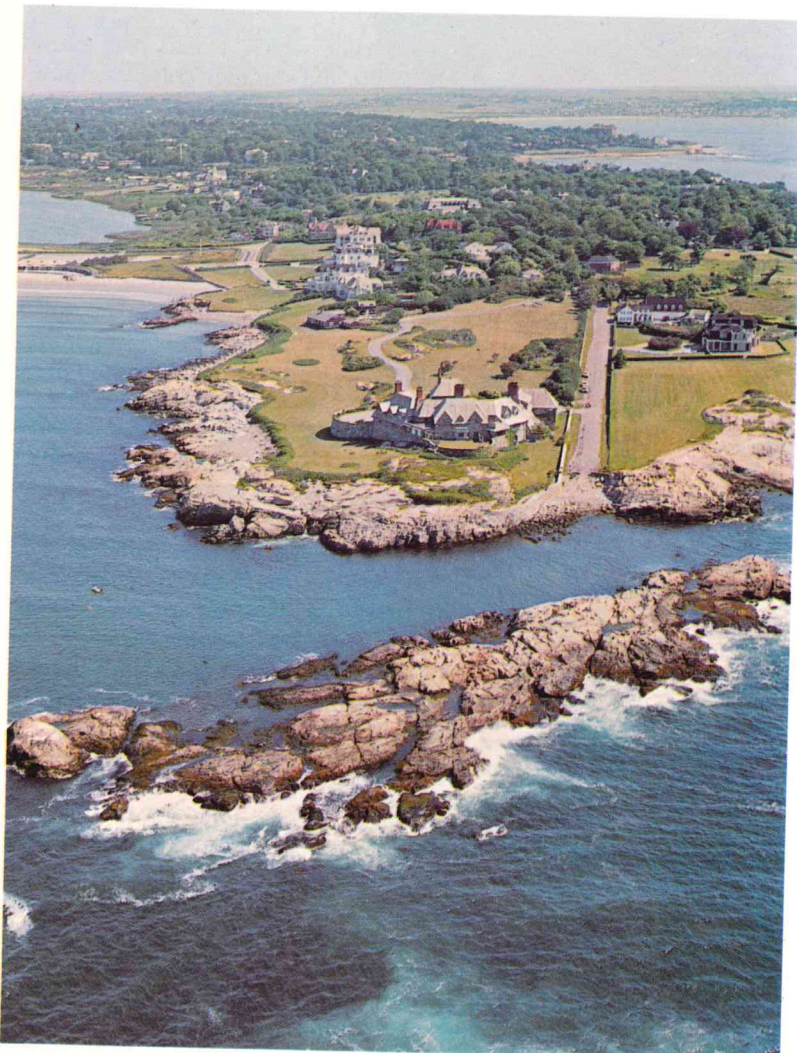
With the automobile it was to become more and more convenient to travel anywhere the heart desired, a factor which saw Southampton, Long Island become a popular summer place for the younger society generation.

Then too war clouds loomed in Europe and were soon to descend on these shores. Newporters cancelled many of their social affairs and gave themselves over to Red Cross work. A lawn fete at "The Breakers" that summer netted \$42,000, enough to outfit a hospital unit to be sent to France.

Mrs. O.H.P. Belmont, who with Mrs. Stuyvessant Fish had succeeded Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt as the society leaders of the colony, gave a Chinese Ball for 600 that year at "Marble House" in honor of her daughter, the Duchess of Marlborough, the most lavish ball ever given in Newport.

"Miramar" built in 1915 by the then Mrs. George D. Widener who later married Alexander Hamilton Rice who summered there until his death a few years ago, was perhaps the last of the summer palaces. Although "Seaview Terrace," built in 1925 for Edson Bradley and now a girls' school was also on a lavish scale.

Verner Z. Reed's "Terre Mare" on the Ocean Drive in 1936, Robert Goelet's "Champs Soleil" built in 1950, and Michael M. van Beuren's "Gray Craig," built in



*Sea and sky and wooded estates blend in a portrait of Newport's summer charm.*



Middletown in 1913 might be termed pretentious cottages by any standards.

While World War I saw a lessening of social activities in Newport, the Opulent Twenties saw a resurgence of lavish living which continued on a slowly waning scale until World War II delivered the final blow.

Contributing to the demise of Newport's Golden Age was the dispersion of the huge 19th century family fortunes among succeeding generations, the inroads made by Federal and State income and inheritance taxes and the inability to obtain servants today.

Although there are prominent members of the summer colony today in Newport, Mrs. Grace Wilson Vanderbilt, wife of Gen. Cornelius Vanderbilt was the last of the so called society leaders in Newport. When she died in 1953, society per se had declined to a point where there was no call for a bellwether.

Perhaps the only logical successor would have been Mrs. Louis H. Bruguere, the former Mrs. James H. Van Alen, who still lives at "Wakehurst" in the grand manner with butler and liveried servants. She and Miss Edith K. Wetmore at "Chateau-Sur-Mer" are the only survivors of the Golden Age who still live on that grandiose scale.

Over the past half century Newport estates for the most part have changed hands. Of 241 summer cottages listed in 1914 only 157 are still standing today and but 80 of them are used as summer estates.

Of the remainder, 52 are year round homes of Newporters; 27 have been converted into apartment houses; 16 are educational institutions, seven are museums of a past era; three are religious institutions; three are nursing homes and 45 have been demolished.

Of more than 450 summer colony families of a half century ago who totalled some 800 individuals; today there are perhaps 250 families who are classed as members of the summer colony.

Today there are only 60 summer colony families who were members of the exclusive social set of the turn of the century and of these perhaps 30 still summer in the great houses of that era.

Few of them are wealthy enough to live in the grand style of their forebears, for while they are extremely well-to-do, there is just not that kind of money in Newport today. Few if any of the late 20th century multimillionaires have ever sought so far to live in Newport.

It remains for Mrs. George Henry Warren, Jr. wife of a second generation summer colonist and who is the leading spirit of the Preservation Society to really sum up Newport Society.

In a television interview on Newport several years ago she commented:

"Newport society will continue. The summer colonists do not take life for granted as they did 25 years ago but society is the banding together of people from different places for mutual pleasures and interests.

"We should remember that the society of the Golden Age in Newport was sincere in living their own lives in their own times and ways. Society will continue because we need recreation and pleasure in the company of congenial people."

Today Newport summer colonists are a congenial group, devoid of pomp and pretensions. They go to Bailey's Beach for lunch and a swim, perhaps visit each other in the afternoon for a cocktail or afternoon tea followed by small dinner parties at their homes or at the Clambake Club in the evening.

Mothers still interested in having their daughters bow to Society in Newport usually present them at debutante dances given either at the Clambake Club or Bailey's Beach. Last year for the first time in years there was not a single formal debut in Newport.

Bailey's Beach still holds its four traditional formal dances during the Fourth of July, Tennis Week, Golf Week and Labor Day weekends, and if occasion warrants there may be a large public ball in one of the Preservation Society mansions either in honor of some distinguished guests such as America's Cup yachtsmen or for charity.

Otherwise Newport's summer society life moves placidly along hardly noted in the press as contrasted to the columns devoted to it in the past.



Old Colony House — 1739