



They tell Newport's story in terms of building.
Co-authors Antoinette F. Downing of Providence,
and Yale's Vincent J. Scully Jr., Woodbridge, Conn.

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The Architectural Heritage of Newport Rhode Island 1640-1915



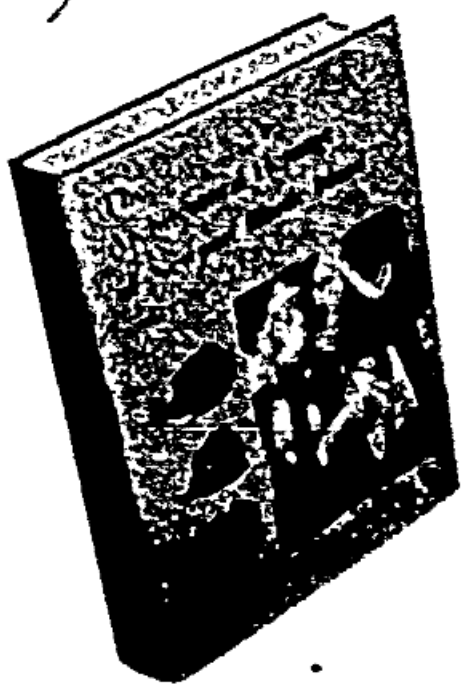
By ANTOINETTE F. DOWNING AND VINCENT J. SCULLY, JR.

Published yesterday,
this book and its pictures
remind Rhode Islanders of great
treasure — from the Old Stone
Mill to the Breakers.



NEWPORT, 1818. Picture painted by imprisoned debtor in exercise periods shows new Mall (1800) with white fence and flanking row of Lombardy poplars. By 1818 new 3-story mansions had

risen between old gambrel-roofed buildings such as Lyndon, Decatur, Rodman and Buttrick houses, Pitt's Head Tavern and Newport Bank, giving Washington Square planned, formal appearance.



Opinionists to Opulence

Few American cities rival Newport as a show place of architecture, colonial to summer white elephants

BY ROBERT L. WHEELER

ARCHITECTURE, humanly speaking, is just another expression of life. And the town of Newport, R.I., has experienced and expressed, in its three centuries of eventful existence, a fullness of living equaled by few American cities.

It follows, therefore, that *The Architectural Heritage of Newport Rhode Island* by Antoinette F. Downing, Providence, and Vincent J. Scully Jr. (Harvard University Press), published yesterday under sponsorship of the Preservation Society of Newport County, is something more than an enlightened and accurate appraisal of the periods of building which have made Newport a fascinating composite, montage or hodgepodge of styles.

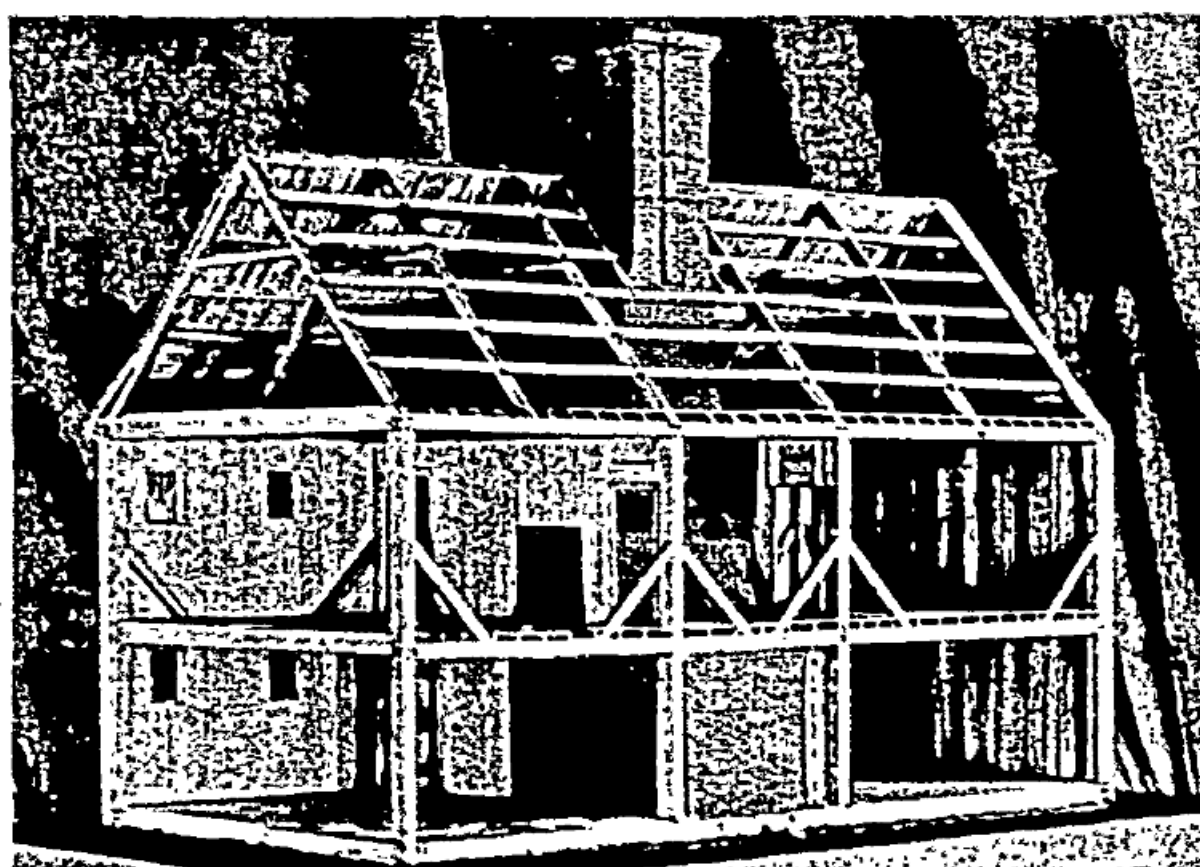
It is also the social history of a unique American town, which has been, successively, a waterfront settlement of religious "opinionists," a booming 18th-century seaport later wrecked by military occupation, a stagnant economic backwater, and an opulent summer resort.

Each of these periods has left behind it, in varying number, examples of the buildings Newport men erected in their days upon earth, from the Old Stone Mill in Bellevue Park to the trumpeting White Elephants that parade the Cliff Walk.

Some six years ago, the Preservation Society of Newport County embarked upon a survey of the old part of Newport extending from Equality Park on the north

to Pope Street on the south and sandwiched between the waterfront and Bellevue Avenue.

This project had for its ultimate objective the redemption of the parent town of Newport from decay and blight and its preservation as a tangible and coherent part of the modern city. Its scope was later broadened to include the resort architecture of the 19th century, the period of Newport's colonization as a fashionable resort.



SCALE MODEL of Wanton-Lyman-Hazard house restores building's 17th century aspect.

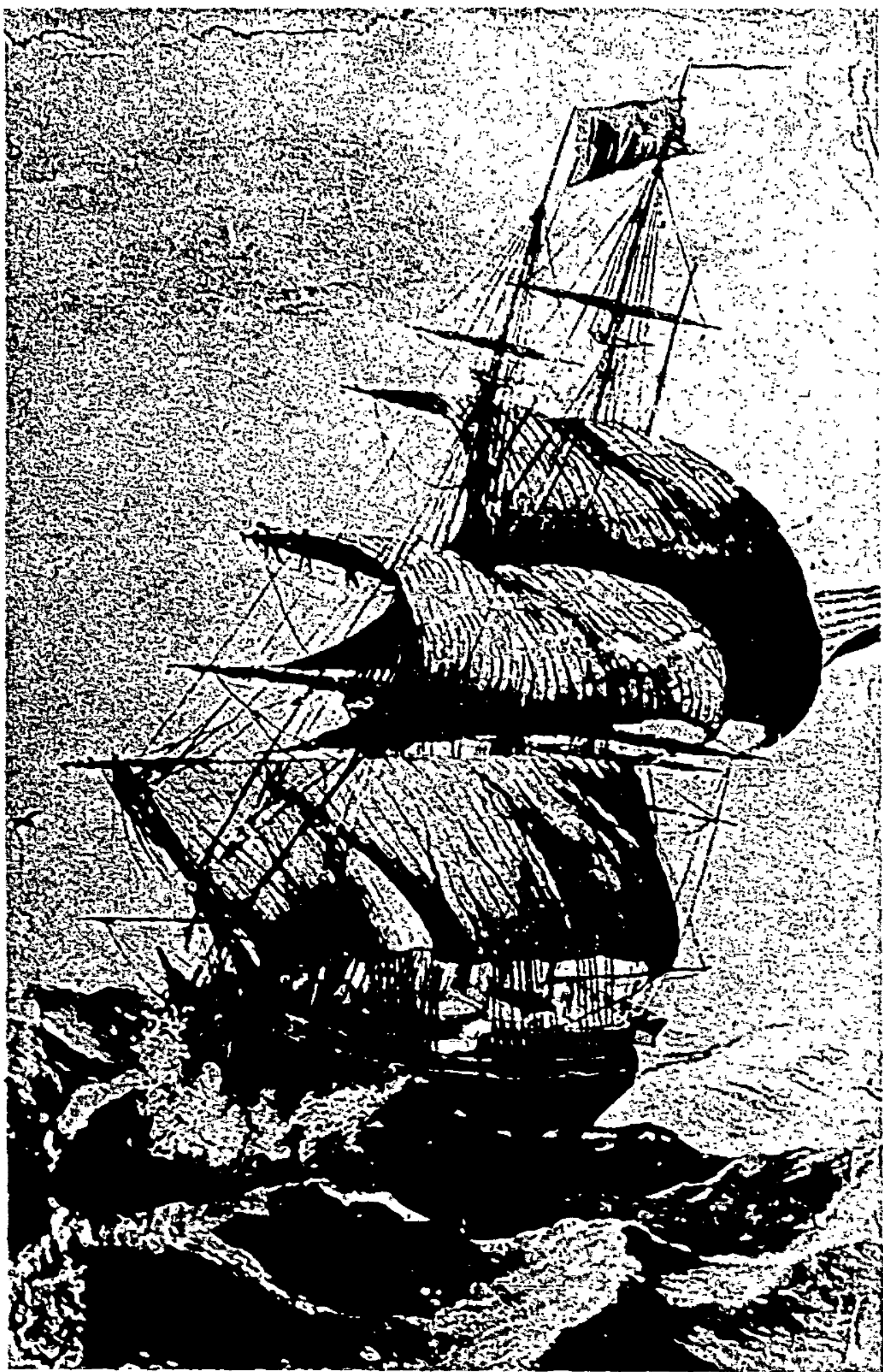
Based on an exhaustive study of documents, maps and plans, plus a painstaking street-by-street exploration of the old town conducted by Mrs. Downing, survey chairman and co-author of the *Heritage*, the primary survey revealed that there are standing in Newport some 400 buildings constructed before 1840, of which 300 are of pre-Revolutionary date and include 10 erected in the 17th century.

Vincent J. Scully Jr., of Woodbridge, Conn., an instructor at Yale in the History of Art and Architecture departments, is responsible for the chapters on resort architecture. His special interest in this field is indicated by the title of a book he is readying for his Ph.D. thesis: *The New American Architecture of the 19th Century: The Cottage Style of the Eastern Seaboard*.

Architecturally, Newport began life as a Late English Gothic town, a medieval village built by country carpenters.

It was founded in 1639, when the Eastons and some 30 other contentious "Antinomians" from the Portsmouth nest of heretics came down to Aquidneck and there "built the first English building and then planted." By the 1680's, thanks to a superb geographic location and its enterprising "muster of opinionists," Newport had grown into a lively, one-street town of more than 400 buildings.

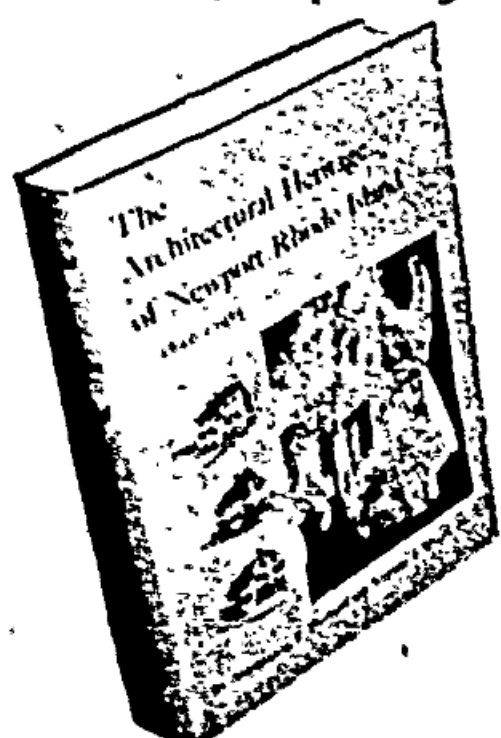
These buildings were constructed by "housewrights" who followed the same building methods and used the same tools—axes, adzes, froes and augers—with which



MURAL from Michael Felice Corne house, corner Corne and Pelham Streets, depicting "Mount Vernon," ship which brought him here.



TIME'S WAY with old Newport houses. Top, an 1870 photograph of Dr. King's 18th century house, Pelham Street. Below, 1948 photo of same house showing encroachments.



HERITAGE Continued

The Grandees Built to Express Their Wealth

their yeomen forefathers had wrought since the Wars of the Roses.

They had steeply pitched gable, gambrel or high-hipped roofs, small, leaded casement windows, immense end chimneys of stone, overhanging cornices. Their structural framework of great hewn beams was as frankly exposed as the skeleton of a mammoth in a museum.

If you put into Newport Harbor in the reign of good King Charles the Second, what you beheld from the deck of the ship that brought you was a single, long, medieval-looking street of small houses, massive and boxlike, built mostly of oak. Falstaff or Ancient Pistol could have swaggered from any one of them.

Seventeenth-century Newport architecture was a Gothic afterglow, a throwback to a kind of English vernacular building as yet uninfluenced by 16th-century Italian style.

NEWPORT'S growth as a town was conditioned by a shoreline, some common water lots and upland meadows, and the then novel concept of the separation of church and state.

Unlike the good little towns of theocratic Massachusetts, Newport did not grow up around a village green overlooked—perhaps "overawed" is a better word—by a Congregational meeting house. Newport, which was settled by men of all "Perswasions," from Quakers to Netherlands and Portuguese Jews, had no meeting houses in the central part of the town until late in the 17th century, no village green until the Mall was laid out in 1800. Newport was a town that grew according to its needs—a hustling, bustling community of wharves and cooperages and tanneries and breweries, which by the turn of the century was rivaling Boston

in shipbuilding and doing a brisk trade with the other seaboard colonies and the West Indies.

Fortunes were being made in slaving. Irrepressibles like Tom Tew were pirating off Madagascar and raiding the argosies of the Great Mogul.

The "muster of opinionists" became a squirearchy of commercial grandees. And these grandees built—as grandees have ever built—to express their wealth. Thames Street is a narrow lane today because of the big mansions they erected in front of the cramped 17th-century dwellings of the Old Comers.

There was, in early Newport, very little public building. The Quaker Meeting House and the controversial Old Stone Mill are probably the only non-domestic buildings that have survived. The former, which exists under a mask of additions and alterations, was erected in 1700 when the hip-roofed and turreted church was still the dominant New England meeting house style.

The Stone Mill, now that cold-blooded excavation has dispelled the romantic legend of its Norse origin, can stand in its own right as Rhode Island's most imposing example of 17th-century stone masonry.

The best known of Newport's extant 17th-century dwelling houses are the Lyman-Wanton-Hazard house, 17 Broadway; the back part of the Mawdsley house, 228 Spring Street; the White Horse Tavern, standing in 1673; the largely concealed Gov. Peleg Sanford house; and the John Bliss house, probably built toward the century's close. The Preservation Society survey has revealed three more, the Daniel Wightman, Perry Weaver and Weston Clarke houses. Jamestown, Newport's island neighbor, has an additional four. One of them is the Paine "garrison house" where Captain Kidd tarried briefly.

In the 18th century's first 50 years, the Gothic tradition of Newport building died with the old yeomen "housewrights." Builders turned to the baroque models

imported to England from Italy too late to catch the *Mayflower*.

By 1758, when the Rev. Ezra Stiles was pacing out his map, the unified group of Newport builders whose outstanding figure was Richard Munday had acquired a new basic concept—the building which is a simple rectangular mass with a flat roof and level cornices, and with the old, forthright structural elements either concealed or minimized. It was a concept which was to continue down into the 19th century and give colonial and early republican architecture consistency and integrity.

Newport buildings of the seaport's Golden Age possessed an intrinsic richness. The facades of public buildings erupted graceful balconies. Ornament became an integrated part of design and classic details luxuriated at focal points.

Mid-century saw a once medieval-looking Newport transformed into an urban Newport of about a thousand buildings—a civilized, sophisticated town having its full quota of doctors, lawyers, artists and men of letters; a Newport ruled by a commercial aristocracy living patrician lives in mansions near the wharves where their ships went out and their money came in.

Neighboring the walled gardens and grand town houses of the big slavers, privateer-pirates and smuggling merchants were the simpler dwellings of humbler folk: carters, artisans, blacksmiths, tanners. Theirs were the houses which Henry James was to think of as "little old gray ladies."

THE Newport magnificoes also built country seats where they lorded it like English squires.

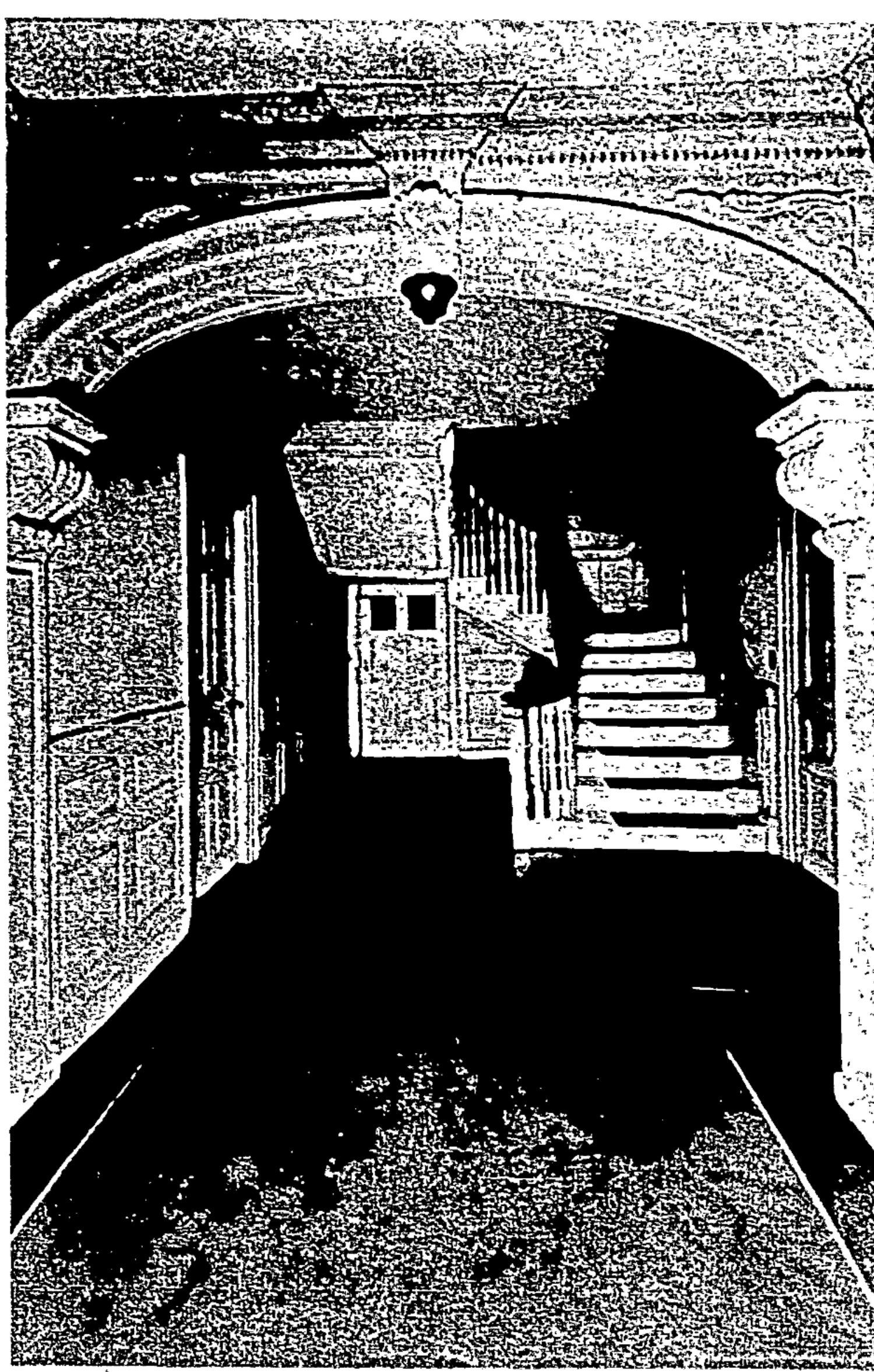
In 1744 Alexander Hamilton, a Scottish physician traveling for his health, thought Newport a pretty town. He did not, however, think too much of fabulous



DOORWAY of Godfrey Malbone's town house on Thames Street was embellished by this interesting capital.



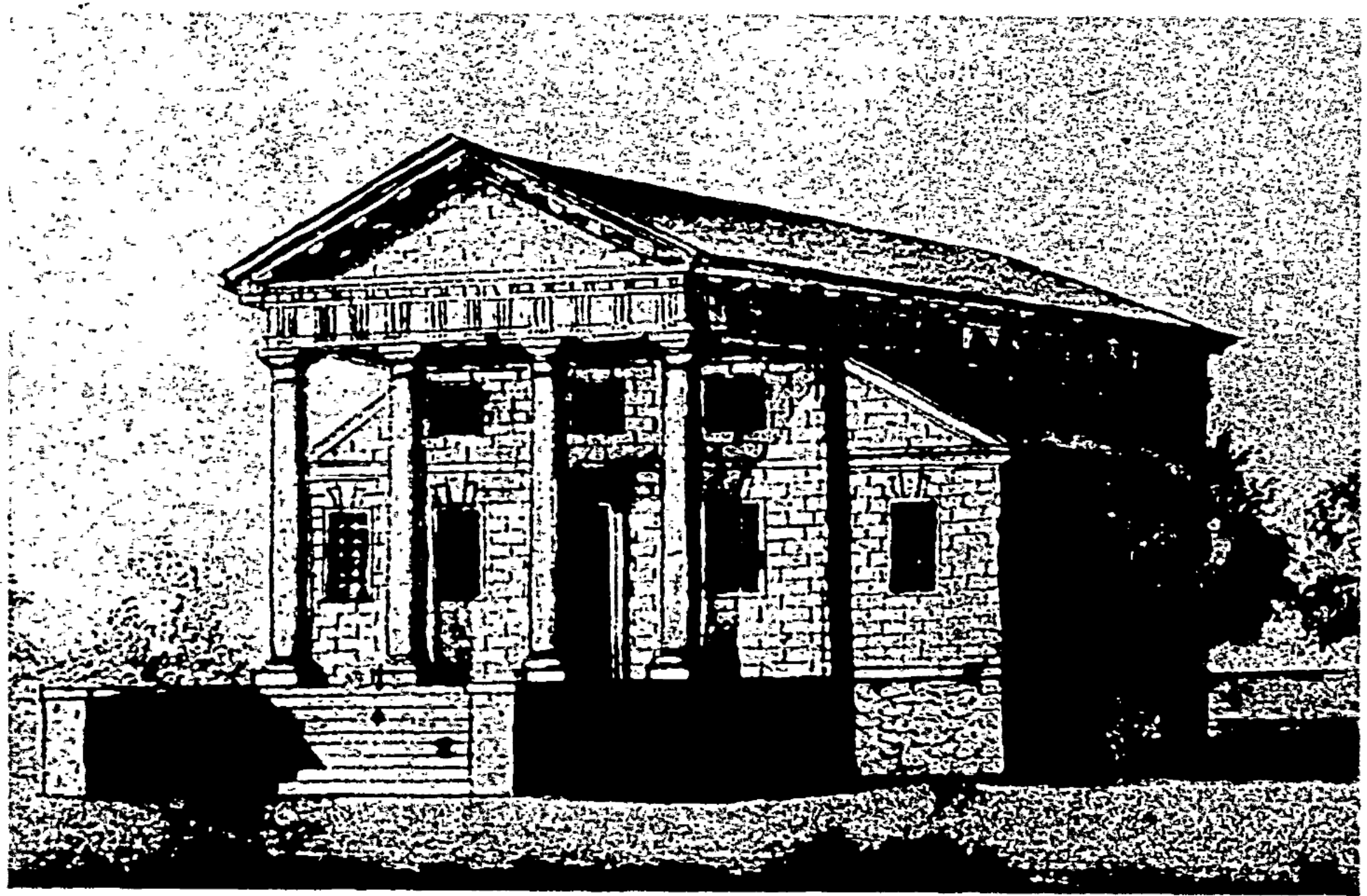
WHITEHORSE TAVERN, Farewell and Marlborough Streets. Land records show old part was built before 1673.



VERNON HOUSE: Stairs and hall of Metcalf Bowler's house, fine example of developed Georgian mansion.



NEWPORT, 1740. From lithograph by Newell. Shows town as it looked from harbor in days when Newport was approaching peak of its prosperity as great colonial seaport.



REDWOOD LIBRARY, Bellevue Avenue. Built in 1748 by Peter Harrison in accordance with current English Palladian taste — a wooden rusticated Doric temple with wings.



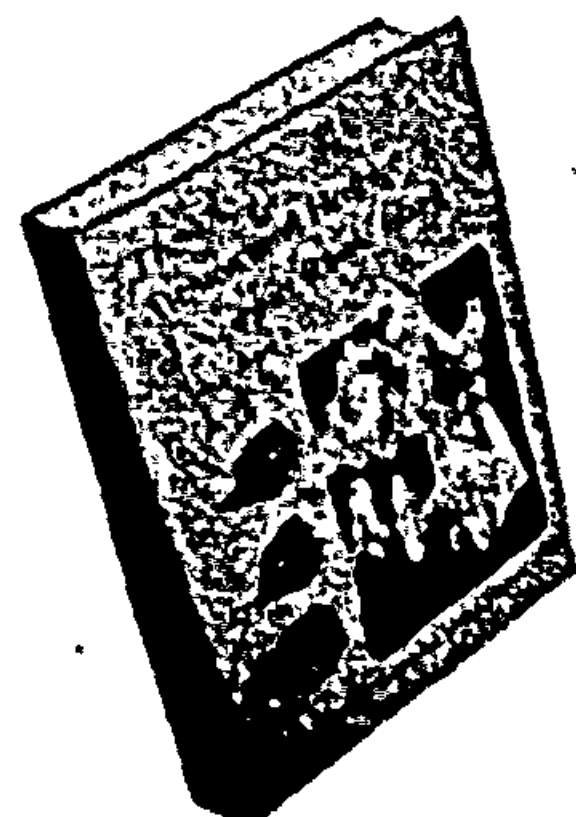
always in tune

Styles in music change, but in cigars count on this: Dutch Masters give heart-warming contentment every time. Enjoy their completely satisfying taste and aroma — "always in tune" with your mood. They start at two for 25¢.

Dutch Masters Cigars

The cigar you've always wanted to smoke





HERITAGE Continued

Great Men and Their Pineapples

"Malbone Hall," second of the two houses which the innkeeper-carpenter Richard Munday is said to have designed for that rough-and-ready Virginia slaver and johnny-come-lately, Mr. Godfrey Malbone.

Malbone's town house at Thames and Cannon Streets was a pretty imposing job, a great, gambrel-roofed mansion with balcony, dormers, roof balustrade and cupola. But in the country house he built near Miantonomi Hill, he really let himself go in pink sandstone for 20,000 pounds.

"The house," Hamilton wrote, "makes a grand show at a distance but is not extraordinary for the architecture, being a clumsy Dutch modell. Round it are pritty gardens and terrases with canals and basons for water, from whence you have a delightfull view of town and harbour of Newport with the shipping lying there."

This was the Malbone house destroyed in 1766 by a dramatic fire which roared destruction while Malbone led his guests to a garden pavilion where they finished their dinner.

All that remains of Malbone's stately pleasure dome today is the stone pineapple from one of his garden gateposts. He also had pineapples crowning the gateposts of his town house on Thames Street.

The gateposts of Abraham Redwood, just across the way, had pineapples, too. These great men strove against each other with stone pineapples.

RICHARD MUNDAY, designer of the two elaborate Malbone mansions, was one of the great builders of his day. His two supreme achievements were Newport's second Trinity Church (1725), and Newport's second Colony House (1741), two of the most beautiful buildings produced in colonial America.

It is also Munday's distinction that he brought to Newport variety of architectural conception and a broad grasp of the baroque style of Sir Christopher Wren's day.

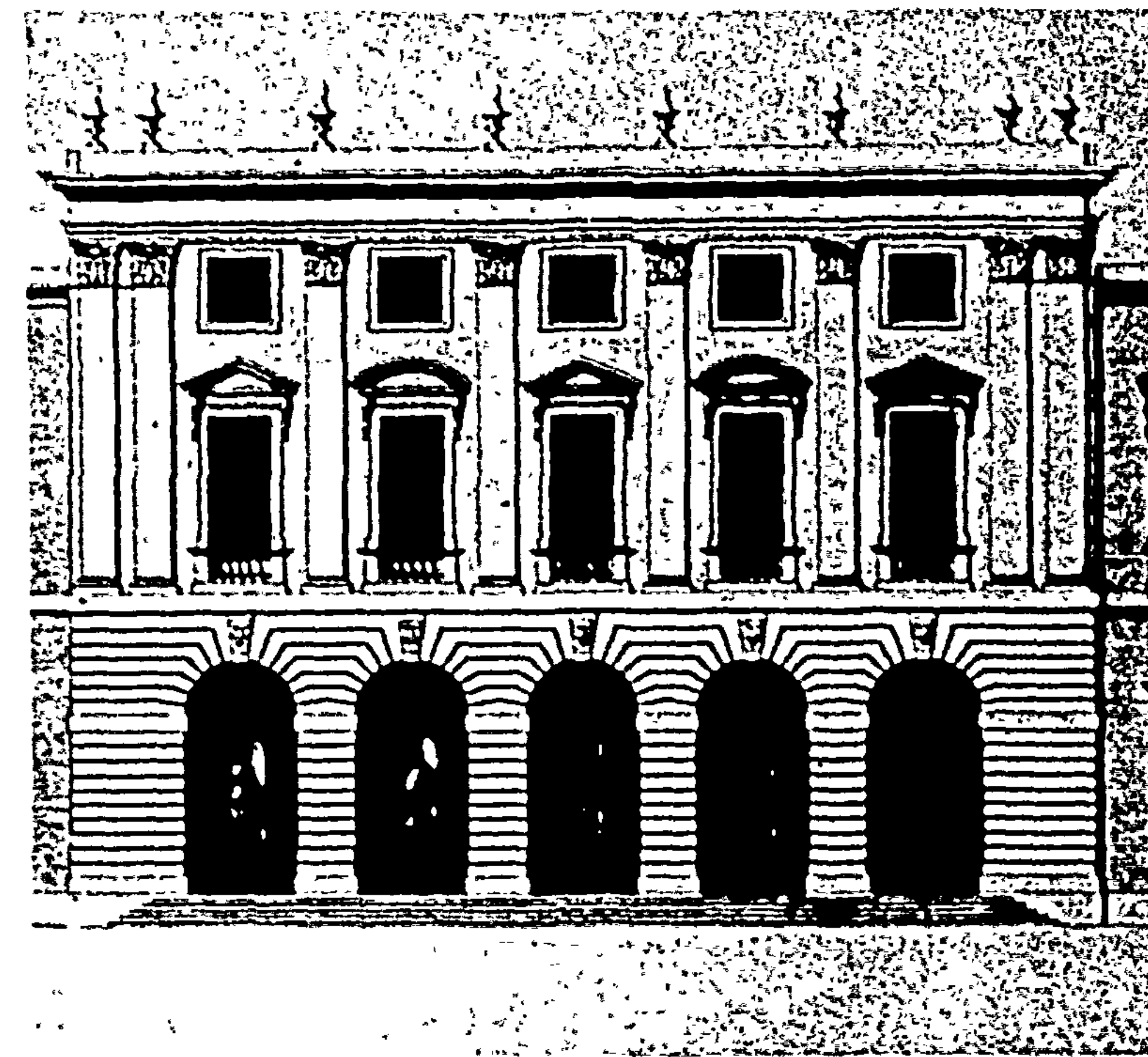
Trinity Church, his masterwork, was the first full Newport expression of the energetic and dramatic



BRICK MARKET, Washington Square and Thames, built by Peter Harrison, whose library supplied idea.



PITT'S HEAD TAVERN, now on Charles Street, one of the city's most successful pre-Revolutionary taverns.



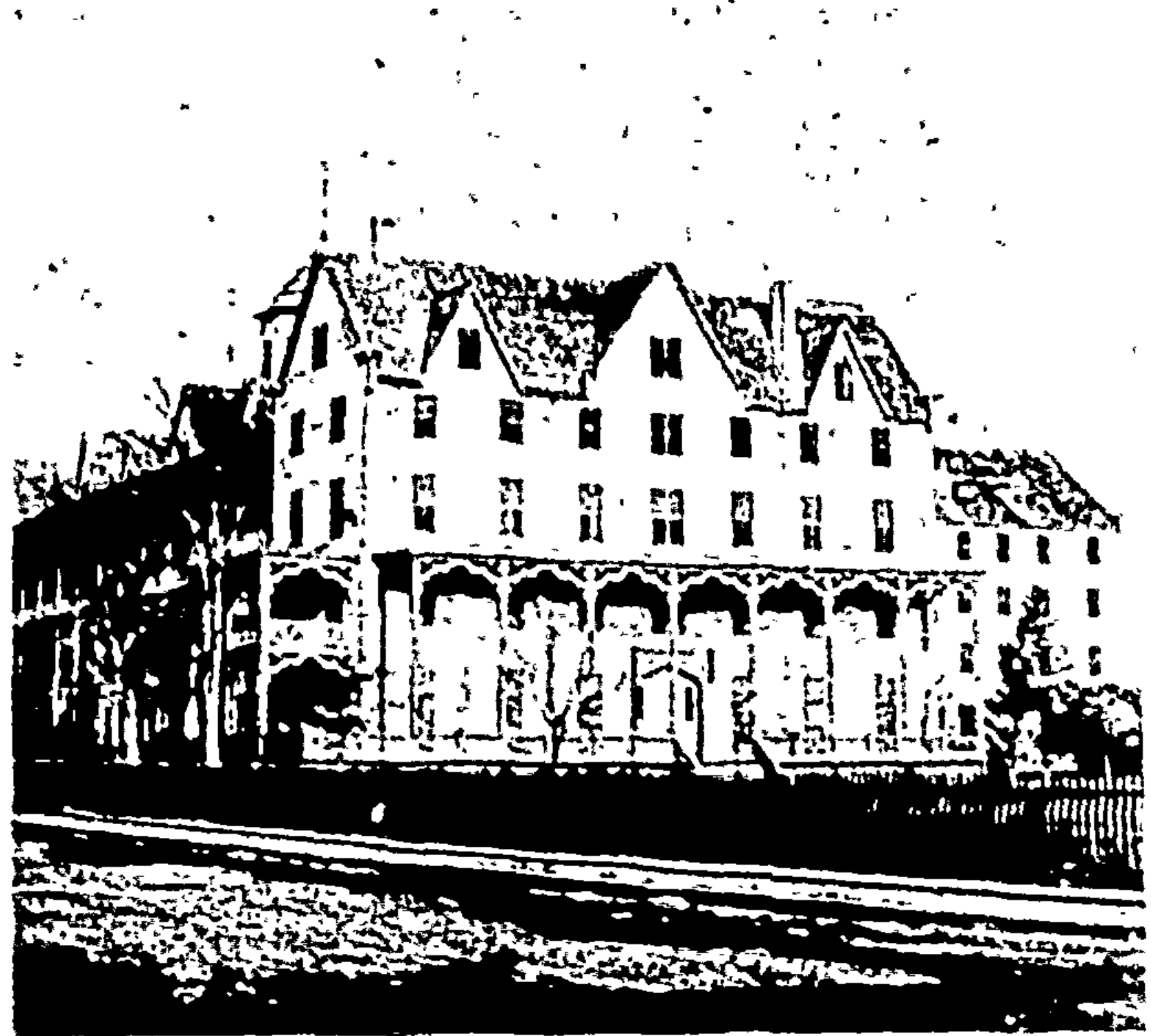
OLD SOMERSET HOUSE, London, by Inigo Jones, adapted by Harrison to meet need of granary, market.



LEVI GALE HOUSE. Greek Revival dwelling on Touro Street shown at original site on Washington Square.



ATLANTIC HOUSE, 1844, built at close of Greek Revival era. An abstract, implacable architectural envelope.



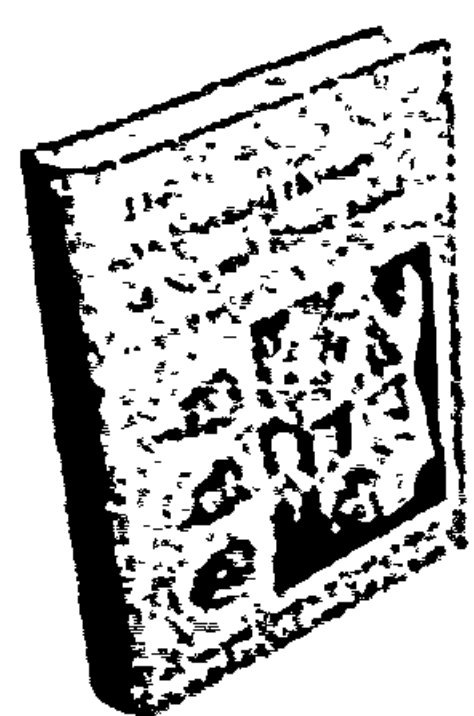
FIRST OCEAN HOUSE. 1840. Also a typical Greek Revival cube, symmetrical and contained, with classic detail.



COTTAGE RESIDENCE designed by A. J. Downing, 1844. An example of bracketed style and vertical boarding.



KINGSCOTE, Bellevue Avenue, by Richard Upjohn, was "a conscious escape from dehumanized industrialism."



HERITAGE Continued

The French Were Pleasanter

forms which were to mark the city's architecture during the prosperous mid-century years.

Munday died in 1740, the year after he "draughted a plan" for the new Colony House, that ample edifice of unacademic charm and dignity which has been the setting for so many stirring episodes of Newport history. Not too much is known of him. He may have designed other fine Newport buildings before he received the important Trinity commission.

There is, for instance, no documentary evidence to connect him with the Sabbatarian meetinghouse, but the detail of the old dissenting church—now an annex of the Newport Historical Society—bears the stamp of Richard Munday's style. It is pleasant to know that he was a pewholder of Trinity and sat listening of a Sunday to sermons delivered from the wine-glass pulpit he designed and taking his architect's fee in installments of salvation.

MUNDAY'S outstanding successor was Peter Harrison, America's first "book-learned" architect, a man of varied pursuits who assembled an excellent library of architectural works, most of them reflecting the then current English Palladian revival, and drew designs therefrom, executing drawings of academic precision.

Harrison kept shop near Bowen's Wharf and there lived the busy life of a Newport merchant, practicing architecture as an avocation. Essentially an amateur, Peter Harrison became—in his spare time—one of the most distinguished architects in colonial America.

The public buildings he designed rank among the most academic and stylistically advanced in the colonies. The important Newport ones with which his name is connected are the Redwood Library (1748), a wooden Roman Doric temple; the Touro Synagogue (1763), a splendid example of Harrison's capacity as a designer able to create new forms out of traditional parts; and the Brick Market (1772), in which Newport's need of an adequate granary and market house was met by a handsome arcaded structure in the English academic taste.

The war which curtailed Newport building and isolated the town from the second phase of 18th century colonial architecture, which filled Providence with late Georgian or early republican houses, gave Harrison troubled last years. He became Collector of Customs in New Haven and a patriotic mob burned his library.

Quite early in the Revolutionary War, New-

port's strategic location at the mouth of Narragansett Bay dictated its seizure by the British, who razed 480 of the town's 1000 houses for firewood and turned the Colony House into a barracks. The French who came with Rochambeau were pleasanter fellows and they even contributed one important building to make up the architectural deficit—a rustic ballroom in the garden of the Vernon house on Clarke street.

It was there that the French officers performed a typically graceful Gallic gesture at the ball given by Rochambeau in Washington's honor. When the immortal George led Miss Margaret Champlin out for the minuet, they took the instruments away from the musicians and played *A Successful Campaign*.

NEWPORT emerged from the Revolution shorn of its social and economic pride. Between 1780 and 1830, building in Newport was practically at a standstill. There was simply no money with which to build Newport houses.

From 1818 to 1828, no buildings at all went up in Newport; thus Newport streets display few examples of the early Greek Revival style which flowered country-wide from 1820 to 1850 in classic temples which were also Christian churches, towns halls, schools, and homes. By the time Newport building had resumed, the Greek Revival was in full swing, coinciding with the early growth of the Newport summer colony.

In the 1840's and 1850's, Newport began to realize on its sole remaining assets—situation and climate. Vacationists sought Newport in numbers which steadily increased.

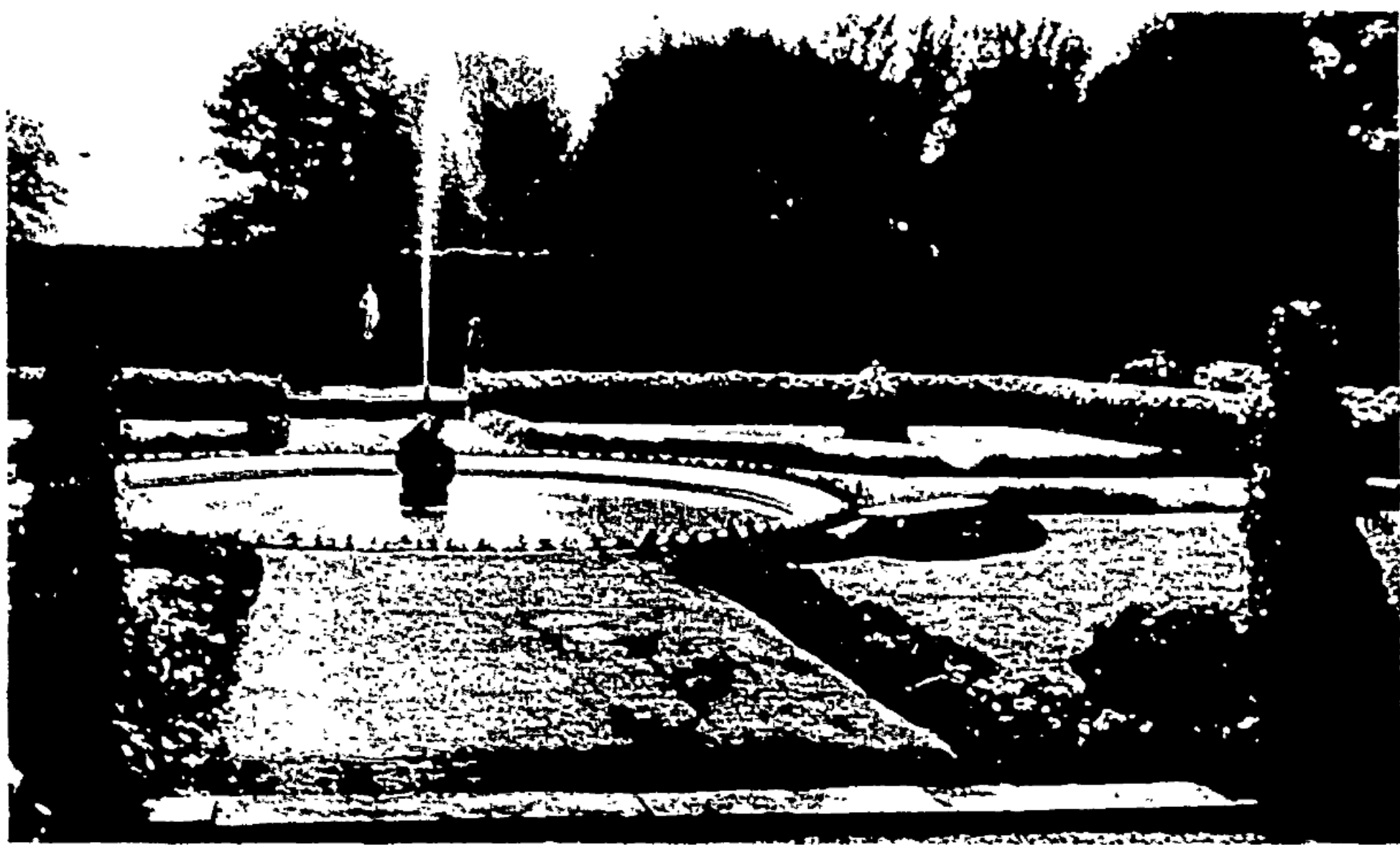
These vacationists represented the urge felt by a rapidly urbanizing America to escape to country air and a modified agrarian experience. Lodged at first in rooming houses or hotels, these escapees soon began to build their own cottages and villas. As a result, the architectural history of 19th century Newport is written solely in terms of summer residences that could have been erected almost anywhere in the East.

Newport building, in short, ceased to be an indigenous growth. It had no roots in Rhode Island soil. It merely followed the various trends of American domestic architecture in an essentially suburban development.

This development was also highly inventive and original. Builders began to experiment freely with solutions for the problem posed by a single-family house sitting on its own land.



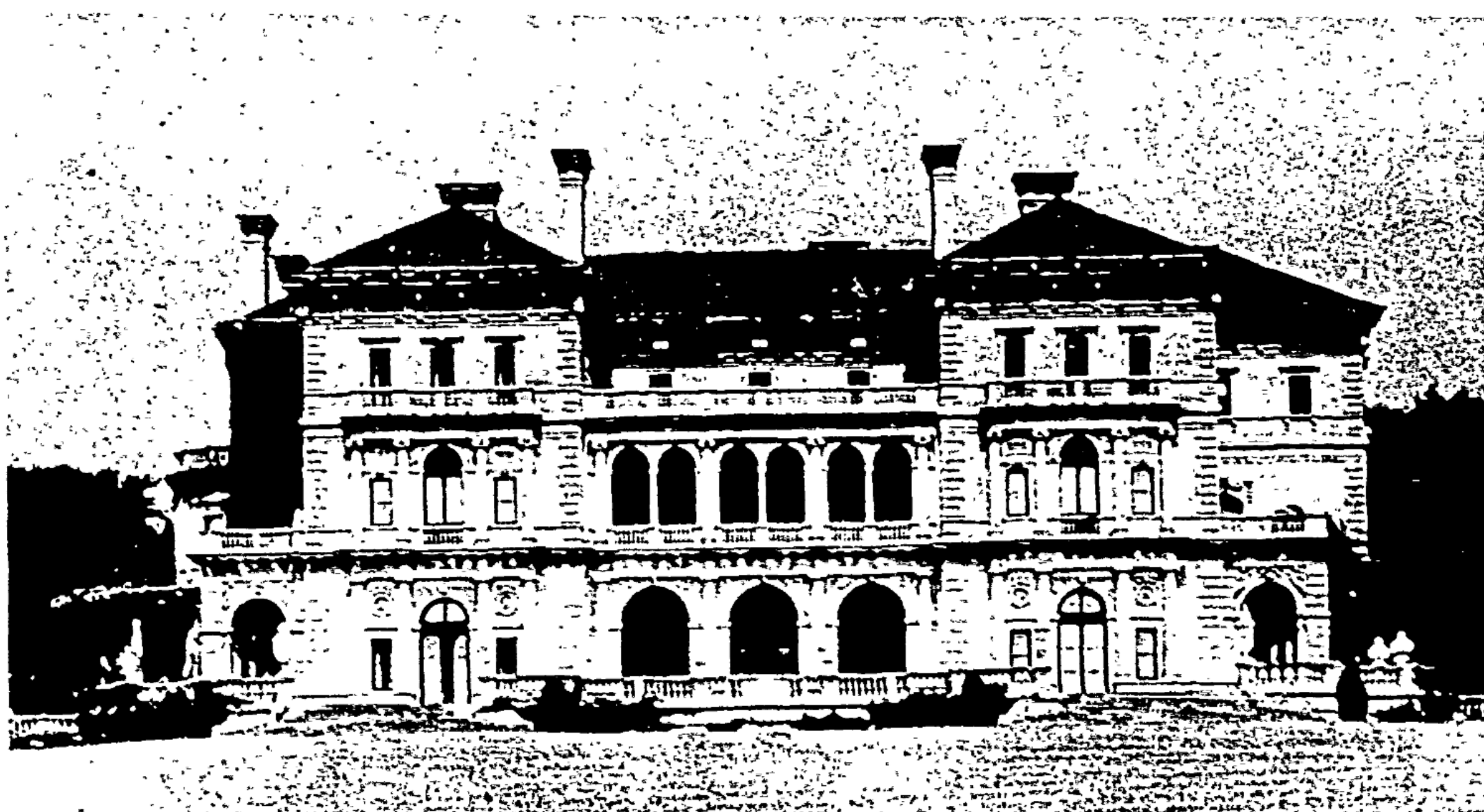
STANFORD WHITE drawing of the Watts Sherman house, 1875, America's first great monument to new preoccupation with surface pattern and texture.



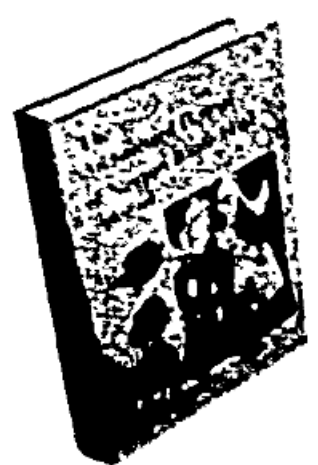
VERNON COURT GARDEN. Copied, 1901, from one created by Henry VIII for Anne Boleyn. Vernon Court is described as "a kind of sophisticated essay in esoteric taste."



STATE DINING ROOM at The Breakers (1892-1895), held acme of the American palatial mansion of the period.



SEA SIDE of The Breakers, modeled on Renaissance merchants' palaces of Genoa. Imperial in scale, it moves toward gigantism and the grandiose. "A monument of architectural eclecticism."



HERITAGE Continued

'Queen Anne' Gave Way to Monumental Grandeur

The shift from the strictly stylistic type of building can be seen in two hotels built in Newport during the early resort period—the first and second Ocean Houses. The first Ocean House was an uncompromising Greek Revival cube. The second Ocean House, while it was inspired architecturally by the Gothic Revival, then entering upon its most creative phase, rationalized the "Gothic" features of the design in such a manner as to assist the building to fulfill its functional destiny as a summer hotel.

This rationalism was an inherent part of the new development which brought to light the characteristically American wooden frame house—the "bundle of sticks"—as an organic expression.

Two related avenues of future development were laid down in the '40's. There was a movement toward the light style of wooden construction and a movement toward mass. Only a very few distinctively wooden houses were built at Newport in the 1850's, a period when heavy, French-roofed houses of brick, stone or stucco were built there in great number.

This mannerist interlude, described as the "mansard reaction," diverted wooden construction somewhat from its organic development. There were other diversions from time to time, but the stick style pursued its course and reached, in the 1870's, a kind of exacerbated baroque of antiquarian tendencies out of keeping with the general temper of the decade, which was little concerned with the past.

The "stick style" development had three basic principles: utility, structural expression, and the picturesque. All three continued in operation down through the three decades which followed the 1840's. A new and disturbing point of view which exerted a pernicious effect upon American architectural invention appeared when native American architects began to imitate French chateaux designs. After 1885, corrupting elements of antiquarianism and academism came forward and usurped the whole field of domestic architecture,

which should have been left free to display and develop a vital tradition of originality and quality.

In this whole development, with its crosscurrents and interruptions, Newport of course played a critical role. It also played a major part in the drive toward a new evaluation of colonial architecture which resulted in the free-shingled style of the early 1880's.

Enthusiasm for early colonial building ran high in the 1870's, and the Watts Sherman house of 1874, a Tudor evocation of sweeping and coherent design, touched off, in America, the use of "Queen Anne" designs in resort building. With a characteristically foggy thought process, the American irked by the political and financial scandals of his day associated the "Queen Anne" style with his own country's colonial past as an expression of simple, unsophisticated living.

IN THE early 1880's, after domestic architects had fought their way through the "Queen Anne" and "colonial" phases, domestic work of originality and quality was accomplished by eastern architects, notably by the rising young firm of McKim, Mead and White.

The firm's first masterpiece in Newport was the Casino of 1879-1881, which answered the summer colony's need of a social center, one of the most distinguished buildings of the early decade. Robert Goelet's Southside (1882-1883) was their next important work, and they also built in the same year the Isaac Bell house and the Samuel Colman house, architectural concepts of originality and power.

Newport teems with examples of the high stage of development the free-shingled style reached in the 1880's. The architectural energy of the period often developed plastic forms of such power as the Pavilion at Easton's Beach and Jamestown's monumental Bay View Hotel. In the Skinner (now Conron) house on Red Cross Avenue (1882), McKim, Mead and White adapted their open planning to a small house type.

In the Commodore William Edgar house built at Newport in 1885-1886, a new mixture of antiquarian-

ism and academism began to take over free domestic design. And in the same year, McKim, Mead and White, ever to the fore in any new movement, built the H. A. C. Taylor house on Annandale Road, an academic monument of great elegance and sterility, static and antiquarian, an architectural denial of reality.

The Taylor house had an immediate effect on building in Newport and started a movement toward Palladian regularity and rigidity which strapped the free style in a "traditional" strait jacket. Worse, its attempt at monumental grandeur expressed a class-conscious point of view, a snobbery shared by clients and architects. There was a growing respect for and dependence upon schools of architecture.

The end result was an imperial eclecticism which paid homage to the French Ecole des Beaux-Arts, by the late 19th century entering its most corrupt and academic phase. Ochre Court, built by Richard Morris Hunt in 1888 for Ogden Goelet, was the first full expression of the demand for archeology and grandeur. A tremendous Late Gothic French chateau, it sits upon a small and completely out-of-scale suburban lot.

Ochre Court was followed by The Breakers, built by Hunt for Cornelius Vanderbilt in 1892-1895, beyond all doubt the acme of the American palatial mansion of the period and more interesting as such—possibly—than as the model of a Renaissance merchant's palace in Genoa. The Breakers culminates its kind. Another interesting monument is Hunt's Belcourt of 1892, the combined stables and house of Oliver H. P. Belmont and Hunt's concept of a Louis XIII hunting lodge. He had a natural bent for this kind of building and enjoyed letting himself go in an Ecole des Beaux-Arts dream world, but when it came his time to die he seems to have repented him of his sins and is said to have expressed the hope that he would not be remembered only as a "Vanderbilt architect."

With some account of the largely anticlimactic eclectic building of the early 20th century, the authors of *The Architectural Heritage of Newport Rhode Island* bring their work to a close.