



About Newport, R.I. *excerpted from the Newport Historical Society*

Since its establishment by English colonists in 1639, the city of Newport has bustled with diversity. Its founders established a policy of liberty of conscience and religion that became a beacon to many in the Atlantic world. Settlers with wide-ranging religious beliefs co-existed in the rapidly growing settlement, unaware that their town's religious diversity was a prototype for the America to come.

Newport became one of the first secular democracies in the world and set a course that would influence much of its later history. During the 17th century, the cornerstones of Newport's architectural heritage were laid. Buildings surviving from this period include the Old Stone Mill, the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, the White Horse Tavern, and the Great Friends Meeting House. Facing a world of intolerance and persecution, members of the Jewish faith and the Religious Society of Friends ("Quakers") found haven in Newport starting in the 1650s.

By the 1760s, Newport had emerged as one of the five leading ports in colonial North America, along with Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. A building boom resulting from Newport's mid-18th-century prosperity included hundreds of houses and many internationally important landmarks that survive today, including Trinity Church, the Newport Colony House, Redwood Library, Touro Synagogue, and the Brick Market (now home to the Museum of Newport History).

Newport helped lead the way toward American independence. Because the city was a well-known hotbed of revolutionary fervor, the British occupied Newport from 1776 to 1779, and over half of the town's population fled. Patriot forces, joined for the first time by their new French allies, unsuccessfully attempted to drive out the British, but the British eventually did withdraw. Later the French, under the leadership of General Rochambeau, began a sojourn in Newport that lasted until 1783, when they left Newport on their historic march to Yorktown to assist George Washington in the decisive victory there.

The British occupation did irreparable damage to Newport's economy. Its landscape became frozen in time as industrialization bypassed the city. This became an asset as the town transformed itself into a summer resort and its picturesque qualities attracted summer visitors.

In the years before the Civil War, Newport became host to a growing summer 'colony' of influential artists, writers, scientists, educators, architects, theologians, architects, and landscape designers. Newport summer residents such as Julia Ward Howe, William Ellery Channing, and William and Henry James reshaped the cultural underpinnings of American life and helped draw more attention to Newport.



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During the Gilded Age, Newport became the Queen of the Resorts, attracting summer residents including elite families from South Carolina, the King and Griswold families from New York, and, later, the Vanderbilts. These families employed Richard Morris Hunt, McKim Mead & White, and other leading American architects to build Newport's famed mansions.

Ever since the colonial period, when the city's harbor teemed with trading ships, Newport's history has been tied to the sea. The fishing industry remains a vital part of Newport's economy. With the arrival of the summer 'colony' and the New York Yacht Club, Newport became a yachting capital as well. In the 1930s, the Yacht Club brought the famed America's Cup to Newport, where it stayed until lost to the Australians in 1983.

The United States Navy, which first arrived in Newport during the Civil War and operated a torpedo station on Newport's Goat Island until the end of World War II, maintains its presence through the Naval War College and the Naval Undersea Warfare Center.

After World War II, one of the most successful historic preservation movements in the country saved hundreds of buildings throughout Newport County. With the success of the preservation movement, Newport began to emerge as a popular tourist destination. Visitors now come to learn about the area's remarkable history as well as to enjoy the beauty and the hospitality of the city by the sea. In addition to its stunning seaside mansions, Newport offers beautifully restored colonial landmarks and many fine small museums such as the Museum of Newport History, which offers an overview of the city's history.

Fort Adams, the Newport Art Museum, the Newport Artillery Company, the Museum of Yachting, Redwood Library, the Tennis Hall of Fame, Touro Synagogue, Trinity Church, and more offer visitors an unrivalled opportunity to explore many aspects of America's history. Music festivals, such as the Jazz and Folk Festivals and the Newport Music Festival, draw thousands to Newport every summer.

The popular image of Newport as a Gilded Age playground for the wealthy contrasts with local reality. While the city continues to host summer residents of dazzling wealth, and while some former summer residents now make Newport their year-round home, most Newporters are middle and working class. Newport's diversity continues to grow. Immigration in the 19th and 20th centuries brought Irish, Greeks, Italians, Portuguese, Filipinos, Cambodians, and Hispanics, who joined longtime Newporters including Jews, African Americans, and Native Americans to enrich the ethnic diversity of the town.

Newport's history is remarkable in many ways, but perhaps most notable is Newport's extraordinarily well-preserved architecture that has survived to give evidence for over three centuries of history.