



*Gilded*

HOW NEWPORT BECAME  
AMERICA'S RICHEST RESORT

DEBORAH DAVIS  
Author of *Party of the Century*





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America's Richest Resort

DEBORAH DAVIS



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*For my mother,  
Jean Cianci Davis Gatto*

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## *Introduction*

When I was a child, I thought that Newport, Rhode Island, was an enchanted place. I loved it when my family drove there on pleasant summer days to see the city's famous turn of the-century castles. We called them mansions, a dead giveaway that we were outsiders. Real Newporters knew the proper term was "cottage," a whimsical understatement considering they cost millions of dollars to build and had dozens of rooms and fancy exteriors. However, I discovered on these visits that most of Newport's palaces were surrounded by gates, walls, and thick shrubs that prevented all but the most fleeting glimpses of the tantalizing world inside.

The Preservation Society had taken over some of Newport's largest properties, including The Breakers and The Elms, in the 1950s and 1960s, and opened them to the public. These houses, once luxurious summer retreats for the country's wealthiest families, were fascinating monuments to a lost way of life. For the price of admission, their secrets were laid bare. Anyone could enter but, as far as I was concerned, their accessibility made them infinitely less interesting than the houses that remained impenetrable. Paying to get in, I decided, was not the same as being invited. Private Newport still beckoned me. Who lived behind those gates, I wondered, and how did they get there?

When I was a teenager and could drive myself to Newport, I finally got inside a private estate on windswept Brenton Point, a dramatic location with a stunning, unobstructed view of the sea. The main house, called The Reef, had been destroyed by a fire in 1960, and only the blackened shell of the carriage house, known as The Bells, remained. My friends and I climbed the broken staircase, holding on to crumbling walls and old beams that threatened to give way at any moment. It didn't seem particularly safe (which is why the building's charred shell is protected by a fence today) but we were young and fearless, and wanted to feel connected to the ruin's romantic past.

Just a few years later, when I left home and went out into the world, I forgot about Newport. At various times, I heard the city was in decline—that cottages were being turned into condos and shopping centers and families were leaving and not coming back. I visited the beach a few times in the 1980s. And, in the early 1990s, my husband and I spent Valentine's Day at an inn where a tuxedo clad waiter belted show tunes while serving us a candlelit breakfast in bed. The experience was supposed to give us a taste of how the rich in Newport lived, but I was certain that real butlers did not sing, nor light candles for that matter, at morning meals.

During those years, when I thought about Newport—if I thought about it at all—I compressed it as in that famous *New Yorker* magazine cover, with just a handful of signature buildings representing the entire landscape. Then, in 2003, I was invited to give a lecture at Rosecliff, one of the city's most beautiful and historic houses. As I drove on Bellevue Avenue, the spacious, tree lined street that the Vanderbilts,

Belmonts, Astors, and Oelrichs (and even Von Bulows) called home, I was surprised to see homes in fine repair, with lush lawns, shapely shrubs, and freshly painted gates standing at attention. Since it was July, there were flowers everywhere. I actually stopped in front of an estate to admire some exotic blooms, only to realize I was looking at a bed of impatiens, the same flowers I had in my own garden in New Jersey. Somehow they looked more extravagantly colorful here in Newport. I smelled a wonderful perfume in the air, a blend of fresh grass, roses, privet hedges, and sea salt. But two other ingredients were mixed into this beguiling scent that were specific to the location: history and money. Blessed with an abundance of both, the city now looked better than ever. Newport was again an enchanted place, and the questions I'd contemplated as a child came back to me in a rush. Who lived behind those gates? And how did they get there?

These are big questions, and I went hunting for answers in the city that one nineteenth century travel writer called "the oldest and most picturesque watering place in this country." The public tour I took as a teenager had taught me that Newport was once a playground for self made moguls with the Midas touch. They turned everything in the city into gold—sometimes quite literally—and ushered in America's notorious Gilded Age. But as I began to do proper research, I learned that Newport had a long history that was marked by rise and fall and rise. More than once, the city was threatened with extinction, yet somehow it always bounced back. In fact, it seemed to be in the process of bouncing back right before my eyes.

I began to spend time in the local libraries, and the details I culled from old books, magazines, and newspapers were fascinating, even revelatory. I discovered that Newport was—and is—a city defined by its women, so I wrote to Eileen Slocum, Bellevue Avenue's leading doyenne, requesting an interview, and was thrilled when she wrote back, inviting me to tea.

This special appointment demanded special preparations. First stop, Google. An old *New York Times* interview with Mrs. Slocum revealed that she preferred a certain kind of black tea called *hu-kwa*, or at least that's what she drank fifty years earlier. I tracked down a pricey tin at an out of the way emporium. I brushed up on my social pleasantries, reminding myself to say "How do you do," instead of the more common "Pleased to meet you." I packed a hardcover copy of my newest book, *Party of the Century: The Fabulous Story of Truman Capote and His Black and White Ball*, for my hostess because she had admired my previous book, *Strapless: John Singer Sargent and the Fall of Madame X*.

I was nervous when I entered one of those legendary private homes I had regarded so longingly as a child. A uniformed maid told me Mrs. Slocum was still at breakfast and would join me momentarily. I waited in a sunny living room, or sitting room, or drawing room, unsure of which word I should use to describe it. Formal portraits covered the walls, and the room was filled with furniture that was more elegantly shabby than chic.

Mrs. Slocum walked in and greeted me. She was small, definite, and surprisingly enthusiastic. It took about three breathy sentences for her to make me feel as if we were old friends, even confidantes. I mentioned I had lunched at Bailey's Beach the

day before. (What a shame she didn't see me there!) I told her we had a friend in common. (Did I know he was seeing two women at the same time?) And finally, I announced that I had brought her my new book. (How lovely of me to think of her!) I proudly handed it over.

Mrs. Slocum accepted my gift and stared at the cover. "That's Truman Capote," she said. I nodded, waiting for further words of appreciation, but all she said was, "He was a nasty homosexual." I thought I had misheard her, or that she was joking. I was wrong on both counts. She handed *Party* back to me, saying, "Oh, I wouldn't be interested in this book at all. And, dear, I don't think anyone else will be interested, either."

Having said the very worst words an author can ever hear, Mrs. Slocum continued chatting about her parents and Newport in earlier days. (They loved mah jongg in the 1920s!) My dilemma was that I didn't want to leave the book, a full price hardcover, with a hostile recipient. While we were talking, I pushed it behind me and slipped it into my bag, hoping she wouldn't notice.

I thought about Mrs. Slocum's behavior long after our encounter was over. Etiquette was practically a religion in Newport. There were strict rules governing introductions, invitations, thank you notes, and every other form of interaction. Was my hostess's outspokenness a momentary lapse in manners, or an indication of something larger? Seeking an answer, I consulted Letitia Baldrige, one of America's most respected authorities on etiquette and the author of a dozen books on the subject. "Rudeness," she diagnosed, after I told her the story. "Or, maybe hardening of the arteries. No Grande Dame I know would ever speak that way."

Actually, in my research I had come across several such instances of seeming rudeness on the part of Newport's social elite, and I was convinced that this was not an isolated, or accidental, occurrence. A story still circulates about Mrs. Louis Bruguiere, Newport's reigning matron in the 1950s and 1960s. When asked if she had received an art book a friend sent her as a gift, she answered curtly, "I did, and I threw it in the wastebasket. I don't like that kind of painting." What Mrs. Bruguiere, Mrs. Slocum, and their fellow Newport colonists had in common was their unshakable sense of security. These were people who followed the rules, but who also made those rules and lived comfortably and confidently in their very own world.

The more I looked into this enchanted location, and the more time I spent there, the more I realized that there is rich and there is Newport rich, and there really is a difference. That difference seemed to me a fascinating subject for investigation, one that would result in a lively social study. The classic Newporter is an intriguing *rara avis*, and I began to think of myself as an enthusiastic bird watcher, one who wanted to find out everything about the species' origins, mating rituals, customs, prey, and, prospects for survival. I spent two years in the field. What follows is what I learned.

# 1

## *The Season 1913*

Newport's Season Promises to Break All Records for Gayety," predicted the *New York Times* on July 20, 1913. If the weather cooperated—and it usually did during the eight week social season that began the first week in July and ended with the Horse Show in early September—the privileged summer residents who flocked to Newport, Rhode Island, looked forward to an uninterrupted whirlwind of activities. Every day in the “queen of summer resorts” brought a new schedule of racing, tennis, sailing, luncheons, teas, dinners, clambakes, cotillions, fantasy balls, even daybreak swims after a long night of dancing. Veteran socialites rushed from one event to another, thinking longingly of early autumn, when they could enjoy a brief respite before facing the annual round of festivities at their winter homes. But at the moment, rest was not on the schedule. Their calendars were packed with an exciting succession of engagements, and, somehow, they found the energy to do it all.

There was a long overture before the curtain could rise on this annual social extravaganza. The return of the summer colony launched Newport's service industries on a course of herculean preparations. Local merchants in the waterfront district put aside their mundane wares and stockpiled exotic provisions they knew would appeal to the rich—caviar, little hens, rare wines, candies, and other delicacies. They also raised their prices; if they played their cards right, the butcher, baker, and candlestick maker could pull in enough money during the season to support their families for the rest of the year. The tradesmen were upset whenever they heard that a wealthy regular was vacationing elsewhere: the absence of a handful of these big spenders could mean a \$500,000 loss in just one summer.

On Bellevue Avenue, Newport's most fashionable street, New York department stores such as Bonwit Teller, Bergdorf Goodman, and Brooks Brothers set up summer boutiques. Their clientele did not want to miss a day of shopping, despite the fact that they were at the beach. The fancy emporium Henri Bendel was stocked with “hats, gowns, wraps, furs, sports clothes, lingerie, blouses,” and anything else a woman might need on a whim, or for an unanticipated fashion emergency. Beauty salons cautioned ladies to protect their skin before they ventured into the sunlight and offered treatments to keep them looking their best. Caswell Massey, a local apothecary founded by a Scottish doctor in 1752, sold Sarah Bernhardt's cucumber night cream and George Washington's preferred cologne. There were also stores that sold serious jewelry. The guilty husband who needed to buy—or the desperate wife who needed to sell—could depend on an agent from Van Cleef & Arpels or Tiffany to handle all transactions with the utmost discretion.

The most elaborate preseason preparations took place in the giant houses on and around Bellevue Avenue. These palatial residences were referred to as cottages, a quaint euphemism that was a throwback to the days when Newport had simple beach homes instead of French, English, and Italianate palaces. There were annual rituals that marked the June opening of a cottage. A small army of domestics—a combination of advance staff members transported from winter households in New York and other cities, and temporary help from local cleaning firms—descended on the sleeping giants with brooms, mops, buckets, and pounds of Sapolio, the preferred soap of the day. Every piece of furniture had its own custom made linen shroud to protect it from dust and the passage of time. These covers—and little bags of camphor to ward off moths—were removed and stored neatly until the house’s annual closing in September. Carpets and drapes were liberated from storage. Floors were cleaned and polished. Chandeliers were dismantled and washed with ammonia. Mattresses were turned. Hundreds of pieces of precious china and crystal were rinsed and laid out in the butler’s pantry, while the family’s valuable silver—and sometimes their even more valuable gold—service was shined and locked in the safe to await the first dinner party. Pots and pans, monogrammed with the family’s initials or crest, were scrubbed and lined up for the chef to inspect.

Outside, the cottage’s grounds and gardens were coaxed back to life. The head gardener and his staff tended the flower beds, hedges, and trees that were the hallmark of the best Newport estates. The challenge for every gardener was to orchestrate a constant array of blooms throughout the summer: this meant precise plantings that yielded different flowers at different times.

The social secretary of the lady of the house oversaw all of these activities. “Miss” (usually a single woman with a refined background but a reduced bank account) was expected to effect a seamless transition from one household to another on behalf of her mistress. It was her job to review the existing staff and to retain the summer help. She ordered the right kinds of stationery in bountiful quantities because, in polite society, communications were written and delivered by hand and the telephone was considered vulgar. She also studied the Social Index, the city’s annual “who’s who” and “who’s where” registry of cottagers and their cottages. This would be the starting point for every Newport guest list.

The family matriarch and her daughters selected their wardrobes—approximately 280 changes for the season—months before they set out for Newport. The bare necessities for the well dressed socialite included fourteen new evening gowns, ten afternoon outfits, and a half dozen suits, along with matching shoes, hats, parasols, and assorted accessories. Gloves, though expensive and made from the finest materials, were practically disposable. Ladies wore them everywhere, including to clambakes, and changed them several times a day. There were some traditional Newport ladies who kept their European wardrobes in storage for a year so their clothes would not look ostentatiously new.

Husbands had a much easier time packing. Their clothes were simple enough: a few good suits, formal wear, and appropriate athletic garb. Their duties never varied. They were supposed to make money—as much as possible—and show up on weekends,

prepared to be the perfect escort.

The preseason frenzy ended in early July. Before the first bed had been slept in, the first invitation sent, the first champagne cork popped, or the first dinner served, the social secretary, the gardener, the butler, the housekeeper, the chauffer or the coachman, the chef, the laundress, and the assorted maids and footmen, were worn out. Their employers, on the other hand, were feeling fresh and eager to get going.

The summer of 1913, the season that promised to be Newport's most brilliant to date, was off to a fabulous start.

## *The Isle of Peace*

Newport wasn't always as social as it was in 1913. Its earliest settlers—a pastor, a clerk, a farmer, four merchants, and a peace officer—were circumspect New England colonists searching for an oasis of religious and political tolerance in a world that frowned on diversity. This band of dissidents settled on the southern tip of Aquidneck Island, also known as the Isle of Peace in 1639. They paid the resident Native Americans forty five fathoms of assorted wampum, ten coats, and twenty hoes. Their modest, little community, which they named Newport, would be a lively experiment, a place where radicals and conservatives, Christians, Quakers, and even Jews, could live side by side.

Newport was blessed with a temperate climate and one of the finest harbors in the country. Thanks to these attributes, the city grew and grew and grew until it was a thriving seaport. A major source of prosperity at the time were the many merchants who participated in the popular practice of exchanging slaves for molasses, molasses for rum, and rum for slaves, otherwise known as the triangle trade. In fact, so many slaves passed through Newport that the city laid an import tax on them, and the money was used for paving streets and building bridges.

Despite this blemish on Newport's early history, the city was considered a cosmopolitan metropolis distinguished by its vigorous intellectual life. In 1746, Abraham Redwood, a wealthy merchant who moved to Newport from Antigua, donated money for a library that would reflect the diverse interests of the community. There were volumes on navigation, geometry, philosophy, and grammar, along with how to books about brewing beer and building a privy. There was also a popular eighteenth century etiquette manual titled *A Young Lady and Gentleman Instructed*. The fact that this book made the list was a sure sign that Newport held good manners in high esteem even then.

Chapters such as “The Importance of Punctuality” and “Small Talk” promised to “inspire youth with noble sentiments.” Young men who wanted to advance in society were advised that they had to be well versed in unimportant matters: fashionable chitchat was a must. The best way to learn the art of superficial conversation, the manual suggested, was by “frequenting the company of ladies.” This was easy advice to follow because there was no shortage of ladies in Newport, especially during the summer.

Word of the city's many charms spread from Rhode Island to Pennsylvania, South Carolina, the West Indies, and other places with punishing summer climates. In fact, the very first tourists to vacation on the island were nearby Native Americans. Every

summer, when the weather on the mainland became hot and oppressive, Rhode Island's Narragansett tribe relocated to the balmy shores of Aquidneck for their own version of the season.

Southerners happily followed in their footsteps. Wealthy planters and their families traveled long distances to enjoy Newport's cool breezes, salubrious salt water, and genteel atmosphere. They found Newport to be a city of happy paradoxes. There were paved streets and magnificent, unspoiled beaches. The townspeople were fine, upstanding New Englanders, but they also had a healthy appetite for pleasure. Year round residents and summer visitors had something in common: they both liked to have fun. Their social activities were reported in the *Newport Mercury*, the first newspaper in America to feature a regular society column. By 1774, only 135 years after its founding, Newport was the country's fifth largest city and its most popular resort, bigger and better than Boston or New York.

Newport's star was on the rise until 1775, when King George III of England decided to reclaim the American colonies. British troops, some ten thousand soldiers, sailed into Newport's harbor and occupied the city. When the redcoats arrived, the locals left. Almost half the population—fifty three hundred townspeople—fled from the invaders. The unfortunate souls who stayed behind were subject to one of the harshest winters in Newport's history and to the bad behavior of the British. And if the British were bad, the German mercenaries who accompanied them were even worse. Like locusts, the visiting army consumed produce and livestock, and cut down Newport's beautiful trees for firewood. They added insult to injury by stripping charming colonial homes of their signature front stoops because drunken British and German soldiers had a tendency to trip over them.

The invaders remained in Newport until 1779, when they moved on to New York. The city they abandoned barely resembled the bustling seaport that once put Boston and New York to shame. The ships were gone. The merchants were gone. Even the books in the Redwood Library were gone, some hidden by concerned citizens who wanted to protect them, others burned by enemy soldiers seeking warmth during the terrible winter.

Newport rallied with the arrival of America's French allies in 1780. General Rochambeau and his troops received a hero's welcome when they sailed into Newport. They brought arms, manpower, and most importantly, plenty of cash, a rare commodity during the Revolution. The French army stayed for almost a year, working with General George Washington on a plan to defeat the British.

Some Newporters worried that their elegant allies were pretty boys, not soldiers. One army chaplain sniffed that the French were "entirely taken up with the dressing of their hair and painting of their faces." Their elaborate toilette, combined with their dandified wardrobe of gold braided uniforms and cockaded hats, did little to inspire confidence in their battle skills. But their skills in the parlor—and in the bedroom—were another story. Dashing soldiers, such as the Duc de Lauzen, France's handsome and silver tongued Casanova, were romantic figures with titles, fortunes, and noble features. Rochambeau's men had exquisite manners, and they delighted in using them. "Before long . . . our politesse conquered them," boasted a proud Gaul.

The French loved Newport's charming wooden houses and wonderfully clean interiors, "so clean you can see your face in it," marveled Frenchman Jean Francois Louis Clermont-Crèvecoeur. But they saved their highest praise for Newport's women. One diarist went so far as to say that the belles of Newport had "the handsomest, finest features one could imagine." The ladies were admired for their gaiety, their independence, their fine complexions, and their dainty hands and feet. Fewer compliments were paid to their teeth because, in fact, many young American women didn't have any—the price paid for their passion for highly sweetened tea. Fortunately, it was a defect that many a Newport belle could artfully conceal behind a raised hand or a demure smile.

The French were a little puzzled by some of the local customs. For all their refinement, Americans did not use napkins at meals—instead, they wiped their hands and mouths on the tablecloth. They also drank spirits from a common bowl, a practice the French found unhygienic. But there was one tradition that appealed to every visiting military man, from foot soldier to general. It was the quaint practice of *bondle*, or *bundling*. In Colonial times, a young man who professed his love for a young woman was permitted to go into a room alone with the object of his affection. They could get into bed together—fully clothed, of course—and caress, following the established rules of *bundling*. Eager to experience this novel form of seduction, the Duc de Lauzen tried his luck with two attractive sisters. When the maidens protested that he was married (*bundling* was an activity reserved for singles), the duc argued persuasively, "Married, oh yes, but such a very, very little bit that it is not worth mentioning."

Count Axel von Fersen, a Swedish soldier of fortune who was part of Rochambeau's entourage, was another visiting heartthrob. He was blessed with blue eyes, blond hair, a perfect nose, and a well built body. In his native Sweden, a country famous for its statuesque blonds, Fersen was nicknamed Big Axel by his admiring king. In France, his head turning good looks caught the eye of Marie Antoinette, the country's lovely, eighteen-year-old queen. Rumors about intimate rendezvous at her palace hideaway prompted Fersen to sail off to America with Rochambeau to squelch the gossip.

His experiences as an international courtier might have made him too big a fish for a small pond such as Newport. But Fersen felt at home in the city and found its people pleasant and well cultivated. He told his father that he admired the fact that unlike his decadent European friends, Newporters lived simply, "without luxury or display." War torn Newport was the last place Fersen expected to fall in love, until, improbably, he met an attractive American ingenue who made him forget the notorious queen of France.

She was eighteen-year-old Eliza Hunter, colonial Newport's "It girl." In a city that was famous for its lovely young women, she was the one whom men singled out for praise. "She is without exception the most beautiful, accomplished, and elegant person . . . that I ever beheld," wrote a passionate admirer. She was also smart and spirited and came from spunky stock.

Eliza was the granddaughter of Godfrey Malbone, a wealthy settler who made a

fortune in the slave trade. One widely circulated story about Malbone, who was famous for living by his own rules, concerned an unusual party he hosted at his estate. A fire broke out during the festivities, and his mansion burned to the ground. Ignoring the flames, Malbone ordered his servants to set up a table outside, and urged his guests to sit down and enjoy their meal. “If I have lost my house,” he said, “that is no reason why I should lose my dinner.”

Malbone’s daughter, Deborah Hunter, opened up her home to the Duc de Lauzen. The womanizing Frenchman adopted a hands off policy when it came to his hostess’s lovely daughters, but Fersen, who was staying elsewhere, felt no such restrictions and instantly succumbed to Eliza’s many charms. He liked to spend his evenings in the Hunters’ drawing room, where he enjoyed Eliza’s wit, good nature, and musical talents. She played the piano while he accompanied her on the flute. He taught her Swedish, she taught him English, and if they had trouble communicating in their native tongues, there was always French. Fersen’s letters to his family included news of Eliza, whom he described as “pretty,” “sweet,” and “gay.” Sometimes he contrived to stay after de Lauzen went to bed, just so he could spend a little time alone with her. Their flirtation was a wonderful distraction for a lonely soldier passing a long, cold winter in a place so far from home.

According to Hunter family lore, their romance became serious and Fersen proposed marriage. But Eliza regretfully declined. She had been diagnosed with a degenerative eye disease and she feared that blindness would make her a bad wife. The sweethearts parted in June 1781, when the French army set off for Yorktown to fight the British. With the help of their friends, the feisty colonies won the war in 1783.

Fersen returned to France, where he resumed his relationship with Marie Antoinette. In fact, he was the brave admirer who tried to save her from the guillotine by orchestrating her dramatic escape from the Tuileries. But he never forgot about lovely Eliza, who, as her doctors predicted, eventually lost her vision. She never married, and there was no happy ending for Fersen, either. After losing Eliza and Marie Antoinette, he dedicated himself to public service in his native Sweden. In 1810, a time of great political unrest in his country, Fersen was savagely murdered by an angry mob.

Years later, in a funny twist of fate, one of Fersen’s descendants married a member of the Hunter family, and the star crossed lovers enjoyed the reunion they were denied in life. Their miniatures—small portraits painted when Eliza and Fersen were young and beautiful—were dusted off and displayed together on a mantelpiece in Newport.

### 3

## *Reversal of Fortune*

After the war, Newport fell into an economic depression that paralyzed the city for several decades. The situation was so desperate that the population barely increased and, during one dramatic slump, ten whole years passed without the construction of a single new house. “Not a pound of paint has been sold in the town since the Revolution,” a townsman griped. Eighteen sixteen was called the year without a summer because the weather was so cold. Travelers who passed through the sad little city sent reports of dilapidated houses, town squares overrun with weeds, and shops selling pauper’s lots of matches and apples. Its state of “quaint and pensive decay” seemed irreversible. There was no hope in sight until, nearly a decade later, some adventurous tourists came to the rescue.

In 1825, Southerners whose families had spent happy summers in Newport in more prosperous times started trickling back. Soon they were joined by vacationers from Providence, Boston, Philadelphia, and even faraway Cuba. They stayed in rooming houses run by enterprising housewives and in some rudimentary mom and pop hotels, such as Whitfield’s and the Bellevue.

Many of the guests at these minimalist accommodations were accustomed to luxurious lifestyles in their year round homes. Southern planter Thomas Middleton and his family lived on a beautiful plantation in South Carolina. But when they summered in Newport, they embraced the simple life. Mimicking country folk, they hiked along the shore, bowled on the lawn, dined on sponge cake and fresh milk, danced with their friends, and enjoyed the city’s beaches, pastoral scenery, and relaxed pace. Social life was informal, even bucolic. A popular form of exercise was the joggle board, an early version of the seesaw. Chairs were attached to both ends of a plank that was balanced on a pedestal. Well bred ladies took turns gently pushing up and down with their feet, “joggling” the board as they engaged in conversation. These women wore simple cotton frocks for both daytime and evening without anyone raising an eyebrow. At least for the moment, it was fashionable to be unfashionable in Newport.

With each successive summer, the Middletons and other regulars noticed that they were rubbing elbows with more and more tourists. They feared that the peaceful atmosphere of their little island was threatened, so they retreated to neighborhoods that were quiet and undeveloped. Some families rented houses for the summer. Others set down roots in the community by building places of their own. In 1828, local children were given the day off from school to watch a house go up on Thames Street, a sight some Newporters had never witnessed in their lifetime.

There was an interesting third option for realty. A common practice for Newport’s