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## Annual Reports

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## REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

ANNUAL MEETING — MAY 27, 1980

At the start, I should like to report on some of the society's activities of the past year. The regular meetings were of unusual interest and were well attended. Mrs. George E. Downing, Chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, spoke on 18th century architecture. Professor George Woodbridge, one of our board members, provided a fresh insight into Rochambeau. Professor Walter Schroder gave an illustrated talk on "Defenses of Narragansett Bay in World War II." The society has been very fortunate to have had speakers of such high caliber.

Mrs. John Howard Benson, Chairman of the Oldport Committee, has kept its members busy supervising the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House and conducting walking tours of historical Newport. Mrs. Howard W. Harding, Jr. organized such tours for all fifth grade students in Newport schools. The committee has also made the society and its services known to an evergrowing number of visitors to Newport. Only yesterday it provided guided tours for the passengers of the S.S. *Royal Viking Sky* when it was in Newport harbor. These volunteers deserve the warmest thanks of the society for the way in which they have enhanced the public image of the Newport Historical Society.

During the past year, a review of the society's manuscript collection has been underway. Christopher LaRoux, an archivist, working under a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, is surveying and cataloging our manuscripts. Word has just been received from the Foundation that its distribution committee has approved a second grant, so that this work will continue for an other year.

Early this month, the Navy Choristers donated the proceeds of their enjoyable spring concert to the Historical Society. We are all grateful that they selected our organization and gave public recognition to the society and its work.

Earlier this year, we submitted a proposal for a grant to the National Endowment for the Humanities to enable us to research our museum collections and prepare a plan for a comprehensive exhibit relating the collections to the social and economic history of Newport in a way that would be more meaningful to the casual visitor. We have positive indications that the grant will be approved and are looking forward to starting the work on 1 July.

Careful management of the society has enabled us to meet the increasing costs of our normal operating expenses. The enlarged annual grant from the State of Rhode Island has been an important contribution and the recently voted increase in the grant from \$10,000 to \$15,000 allow us to face the coming year with confidence. We are most grateful to our local representatives in the General Assembly and especially to Senator Robert McKenna and State Librarian Elliott E. Andrews for obtaining this added assistance for us.

I record with sorrow that, during the past year, we have lost two former officers who gave unstintingly of their time and talents to the interests of the society.

C.P.B. Jefferys, while a member of the faculty of St. George's School, was elected a director in 1944 and served as president from 1965 to 1972. He contributed many articles to the society's bulletin and after his retirement as president, wrote a successful book, *Newport 1639-1976: An Historical Sketch*, which was published by the society for the bicentennial year.

Dr. Gilbert H. Doane, a nationally known genealogist, upon retirement from academic life, joined the board in 1968 and served as a vice president from 1974 to 1979. Earlier he had made an analysis of the society's condition and aims, a study which has been used as a guide for the society's development.

The present form and activities of the society owe much to the foresight and directing hands of these two men.

It now gives me pleasure to report on the people who now serve and direct the society's daily life.

Special thanks are given to Mr. Edward Sherman and his membership committee. Their work of the past year has been excellent and is best shown by the following membership figures as of April 30th:

Active .....	401
Family .....	266
Supporting .....	38
Contributing .....	19
Student .....	5
Business and Professional .....	43
Corporate .....	16
Life .....	51
Total .....	<u>839</u>

Dr. Howard S. Browne, chairman, and his editorial committee are to be commended for the recent issues of *Newport History*. The articles, combined with well-selected illustrations, continue to make significant contributions to our knowledge of local history.

Special mention should be made of the excellent job being done by our executive director, Captain Wilbur T. Holmes. His administrative grasp of all aspects of the society's organization and activities has produced a smooth running institution, a controlled financial base and a growing public image.

Dr. William Reitzel, our first vice president, has decided not to stand for reelection this year. I am very grateful to him for his fine work in that position during the past eight years and am glad that he will continue as a member of the board.

The staff has gone about their work in their usual quiet and effective way, serving the members and the visiting public in a manner fully appreciated by all. More of what they have been doing will be learned from the other reports that follow.

I wish to thank the members of the board and the various committees for their continued good work and fine support. We are also most grateful to the members and friends of the society, who have made many generous donations during the past year.

Now, in closing, I would like to discuss the future needs of the society and the practical problems related to those needs. The Newport Historical Society is coming closer each year to being a public institution, inevitably serving the interests of more than just its members. It is an important local museum with an expanding collection. It is used more for research than formerly. This pattern of growth, and the responsibilities it brings, also present problems for the future: additional staff, growing security requirements and perhaps, in the course of time, more and better space. Awareness of these increasing needs, including the financial means to make it all possible, has occupied the attention of your board and its officers.

*Respectfully submitted,*  
WILLIAM A. SHERMAN,  
President

REPORT OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
ANNUAL MEETING — MAY 27, 1980

*Personnel*

Last November our bookkeeper and secretary, Joanne Roberts, left for greener pastures. She was replaced by Judith Ronayne, a graduate of URI and resident of Newport. Judy very quickly mastered the elements of her job and has been a great help to me in coping with daily administrative and fiscal chores. There have been no other changes in the permanent staff. As the President reported, Christopher LaRoux started on our archival project on June 1st and has made significant progress even though there remains much to do. We were able to convince the Rhode Island Foundation that the project merited further support and it is with pleasure that I can report Chris will be with us for another year. Susan Silva has worked with us part time throughout the academic year under the college work/study program helping out in a variety of ways. Previously she had worked for us as a guide at the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, always showing a keen sense of responsibility and cooperation that was remarkable. I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank her for past services and wish her well in her new career. On the first of July of this year we expect to welcome Jeanne Vibert, a Graduate Fellow of the Winterthur Museum Program, who will undertake the planning project to which the president referred.

*Buildings and Grounds*

Last summer all of the exterior trim of these buildings was repaired and painted and new steel mesh screens placed in all ground level windows. In the course of this work it was discovered that a large section of brick facing on the front of the building was about to give way, requiring immediate repair. Thanks to the generosity of Mrs. Wright, funds for this unexpected problem were made available and the work completed in a very short time. Also, last summer the Friends Meeting House was repainted and a number of minor but necessary repairs made to the exterior of that building. As far as I can tell, all major material requirements of our three properties have been met and we can anticipate only routine maintenance and upkeep for the foreseeable future. Last year I reported to you about the installation of an automatic flue damper device which purported to save as much as 20% of fuel consumption and I said I would hope to confirm this at the next annual meeting. Well, I can state definitely that we used exactly

20% less fuel than in the preceding year so the gadget has proved its worth. Of course, a determined effort to keep the thermostats down may also have contributed to this happy result.

### *Museum Accessions*

Important accessions during the year included a handsome silver tankard by Samuel Vernon dating from about 1736, a bequest by Edward W. Gould, Jr., whose family had held the tankard for over 250 years; a large set of scales formerly used by the City of Newport to check commercial weights and measures; a portrait of Oliver Hazard Perry, Jr., son of the Commodore, painted by Jane Stuart — a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Oliver Hazard Perry Baldwin. From the estate of Lilliam D. Fox we received three fine miniatures painted in the early years of the 19th century and a Scott Family Coat of Arms and Pedigree Roll painted on parchment dating from 1607. The Roll is one of a very few examples of its kind known in New England. Mrs. Fox also made a bequest of \$10,000 to the Society. Inez West of Portland, Oregon, who loaned us the tall Claggett clock in this room, has recently given the Society a number of objects associated with the Taylor family formerly of Newport (William Vigneron Taylor was Perry's Sailing Master at the Battle of Lake Erie). Among these are 18th century silver cups or goblets and a beautiful silver ladle.

### *Museum Attendance*

I calculate that approximately 7000 visitors came in to go through the museum or to use the research facilities. This is a slight increase over the figure for the preceding year. The total includes some 360 fifth graders who participated in the annual school tours conducted by our Oldport committee in recent weeks. This committee has also been active in providing guided walking tours for various visiting groups culminating in a tremendous effort to prepare for and carry out tours for the National Trust and Metropolitan Museum Cruise passengers from the ship that came here yesterday. I cannot say too much to honor the dedication of the Committee and its volunteers in these time-consuming activities.

### *Finances*

The society ended its fiscal year on an even keel with both income and outlay closely approximating the budgeted figures. Inevitably, some costs went up, particularly in printing and supplies, but were offset by increased revenue from the endowment

thanks to the high interest rates which have prevailed. The budget which I have prepared for this coming year for approval by the board will remain at just about the same level.

In closing I want to thank the president and the board of directors for their continued understanding and support and members of the Staff who are, as always, the mainstay of the operation.

*Respectfully submitted,*

WILBUR T. HOLMES,

Executive Director



## REPORT OF CURATOR OF MANUSCRIPTS

ANNUAL MEETING — MAY 27, 1980

The manuscript collections have been enriched this year by the addition of letters and papers of Captain William Vigneron Taylor and of his sons Admiral William Rogers Taylor U.S.N. and Lt. Oliver Hazard Perry Taylor U.S.A. The society had already received years ago the naval commissions of Admiral Taylor which range from his appointment as passed midshipman to Admiral and are signed by the presidents from Andrew Jackson through Ulysses S. Grant. We also have the log of the *Lawrence* kept by Captain Taylor during the battle of Lake Erie. From the recent gift we have received the naval commissions of Capt. Taylor from sailing master, lieutenant, master commandant to captain. The first two of these are signed by James Madison, the third Andrew Jackson and the last by John Tyler. There are also two original letters of Oliver Hazard Perry with whom Captain William V. Taylor served.

The second son, Oliver Hazard Perry Taylor, entered West Point, class of 1840 and became an officer in the Army. He was killed in 1858 in a battle with the Spokane Indians in Oregon. He had been breveted for gallant conduct previously in New Mexico.

Deeds and bills have been received relating to the Covell boat building firm on Long Wharf.

Various interesting scrap books of Othniel Foster Nichols, and of material gathered over the years by Gardner Dunton will be of much help to researchers.

A file giving names and dates of artists who have lived, painted, or been connected with Newport up to 1950 has been compiled by Mr. Michael Dwyer and donated to the society.

Through a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation Christopher LaRoux has been with us this year as archivist and, we are happy to say, a further grant has been made to continue him for the next year. He has been busy cataloging and encapsulating documents having been trained in the most recent methods of preserving manuscripts that have deteriorated over the years.



Researchers have come from all parts of the country including Texas, California and the state of Washington, and many letters have been answered concerning genealogy and matters of Newport history.

*Respectfully submitted,*

GLADYS E. BOLHOUSE,  
Curator of Manuscripts

