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A Note from the Executive Director

A new fashion in early nineteenth-century American society was for the middle-class vacation, initially conceived as an escape from summer heat in the South and the emerging large cities. By the 1840s, Newport had become a main competitor in a summer circuit of vacation resorts (quaintly termed “watering places”) that also included Long Branch in New Jersey, Bar Harbor island off the north coast of Maine, Saratoga in upstate New York, and Gloucester on the Massachusetts coast to the east of Boston. In no time, Newport was being touted as the “Queen of Resorts,” but its status reached a crescendo in the 1870s thanks to the “New York invasion” by the most socially prominent and wealthiest denizens of Fifth Avenue. Until cut short by World War I, the ensuing Gilded Age—renowned for opulent living and unbridled spending—flourished as robustly at Newport as anywhere.

In this issue of *Newport History*, Kay Davis examines both familiar and unfamiliar aspects of that era when Newport enjoyed its greatest popularity, renown, and social importance. She addresses class structure in Newport from 1870 to 1914, and examines how conspicuous consumption, social rituals, transportation, sports, and other forms of recreation factored into summer life. Kay Davis is a writer, editor, and independent scholar with a Master of Arts in English and American Studies from the University of Virginia at Charlottesville. She is also a graduate of the Newport Summer School in Architectural History, co-sponsored by the Victorian Society in America and Salve Regina University. Ms. Davis adapted this article from her 2001 Master’s thesis on class and leisure in Newport.

The second article in this issue of the journal is by the journal’s Editor, James L. Yarnall, an Associate Professor at Salve Regina University, where he teaches the history of world art and architecture. Two years ago, Dr. Yarnall completed *Newport Through Its Architecture: A History of Styles from Postmedieval to Postmodern*, published in 2005 by the University Press of New England in conjunction with Salve Regina University Press. In the belief that architecture is a sophisticated visual language that is not readily understood by all today, he wrote this book to help articulate the many distinct architectural styles that flourished in Newport throughout its history. By presenting a capsule summary in the journal of the primary styles leading up to and involving the Gilded Age, he seeks to do the same here in a more concise and accessible format. This article also provides a showcase for the Newport Historical Society’s extensive and important photograph collections—an important window into the rich and varied history of Newport County.