

1974

Newport--Those were the days

Thomas Hobbes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Hobbes, Thomas (1974) "Newport--Those were the days," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 27 : No. 3 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol27/iss3/12>

This Additional Writing is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

NEWPORT: THOSE WERE THE DAYS

"It is a great misfortune that our military schools should be established in connection with the watering places characterized . . . in scenes of social display and dissipation. Surely the students will be wasted . . . on the giddy maidens who disport themselves on the rocks in sunbonnets!" These were the words of Congressman William McAdoo as he described the relationship between Newport and the Naval War College in 1892. In 1974, though giddy maidens no longer wear sunbonnets and the social display is less conspicuous, Newport still offers a wide variety of entertainment and cultural activities for the family and enterprising bachelor.

Historic Newport, one of the key cities in the upcoming bicentennial celebration, also boasts over 300 pre-Revolutionary War buildings, more than any city in the United States. The old homes and public buildings, combined with the narrow streets (designed for horse traffic and often a challenge for horseless carriages) create an 18th century seaport atmosphere. Where else, for example, could a visitor dine in an 18th century tavern on fine local cuisine, step outside and see a waterfront filled with square-riggers and the finest sailing ships on the east coast? Numerous buildings have been restored to their colonial state by private owners or local organi-



"The Colony House," one of the rare early government buildings of America (1739)

96 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW



"The Breakers," built for Cornelius Vanderbilt in 1895.

zations and are open to the public, and many of them have particular historic significance. The Touro Synagogue, for example, was the first synagogue constructed in the new land. As a measure of how risky an undertaking this was, the synagogue was built with a secret escape tunnel! Trinity Church and the Old Colony House also stand as splendid examples of colonial architecture. The Newport Artillery Company boasts a unique history and the honor of being the oldest (1741) continuous commissioned military unit in the United States. A decided advantage to the sightseer is that all of these 18th century buildings are within walking distance of one another in downtown Newport.

A resort for the idle rich as early as 1730, Newport became a playground for the Vanderbilts and other money barons in the late 19th and early 20th

centuries. Most of the members of this elite have since departed, but the incredible monuments to wealth that they built remain. Called "summer cottages," these mansions more accurately reflect the size and elegance of English castles or French chateaus and are themselves well cared for museums. Most are filled with beautiful collections of art, furniture, antiques, and assorted treasures gathered by their onetime owners. One of the mansions, for example, has a room made from the very walls, ceiling, furniture, draperies, et cetera, which once belonged to Marie Antoinette and was taken, piece by piece, from a French palace! Many of these homes, like the more modest colonial dwellings, have been restored and are open to the public.

To the fascination of the local community, Newport's gaudy past was revealed in the summer of 1973 when "The

THOSE WERE THE DAYS 97

"Great Gatsby" was filmed at Rosecliff, one of the mansions. Acting as movie extras, Naval War College students and members of Bellevue Avenue society found themselves sampling the good life of the early 20th century and with no lesser stars than Robert Redford as Jay Gatsby and Mia Farrow as Daisy.

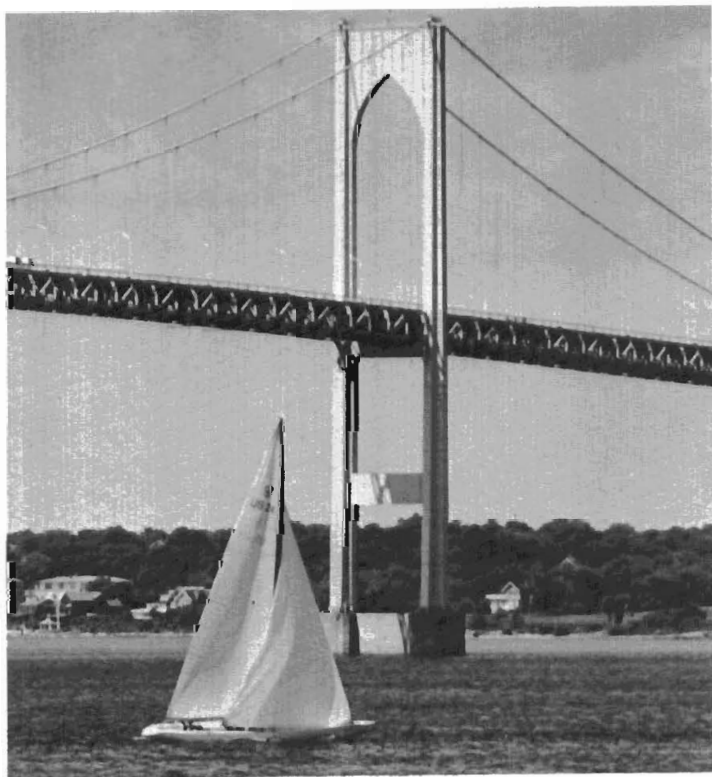
For those who are more geared to participation than sightseeing, any number of opportunities are available. The base tennis courts, both clay and all-weather composition, are accessible for a noontime match. A War College tournament is held in the fall for singles, doubles, and mixed doubles participation.

Many families may prefer to gather either on the golf course or, during the winter, on the ski slopes. While the base itself has no facilities for either of these sports, skiing as well as hiking, camping,

and mountain climbing are available in nearby Vermont and New Hampshire. The special services program offers a discount program for many of these areas as well as for the local golf courses.

Sports such as golf and tennis are common to most areas, but for the discerning individual who looks for the *specialty of the house*, Rhode Island, the *Ocean State*, offers a wide variety of water sports. One area, always a big attraction with students, is the officers beach club. The club provides a guarded beach area complete with bathhouse, playground, bar, and snack bar. The relatively uncrowded beach provides a perfect setting for family cookouts and gatherings as well as the frequently held "adults only" parties.

Newport, perhaps the recreational and sport sailing capital of the United



"Sailing in historic Narragansett Bay."

98 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW



"Naval War College family housing," located on Fort Adams.

States, hosting such prestigious events as the America's Cup series and the Newport to Bermuda race, also offers the Navy Yacht Club. Within easy walking distance of the college, interested students and their families can rent either 30-foot Shields, 19-foot Rhodes, or 14-foot Mercury sailboats. The fine racing Shields craft, donated to the college by master sailor Cornelius Shields, offer a particularly exhilarating sense of speed and grace. The use of all boats is, of course, predicated on a thorough knowledge of sailing, and for those interested but unskilled, lessons are given. The more experienced sailors might want to enter the weekly intra-club races held during the summer months. Also available through the club are slips for boatowners and launching facilities for smaller craft.

In conjunction with boating, Rhode Island offers both fresh and saltwater fishing. As with sailing, the state hosts two prestigious events, the U.S. Atlantic Tuna Tournament and the Rhode Island

Tuna Tournament. Common game fish are mackerel, bluefish, striped bass, flounder, cod, and, of course, tuna.

The sports mentioned are but a few of those offered by Newport and/or the Navy. Bowling leagues, badminton, handball, squash, skeet shooting, and a host of others are here for the taking. Even the confirmed spectator can take comfort from the proximity of various professional teams in Boston and Providence.

If athletics are not your cup of tea, yet you have a strong desire to participate in *something*, Newport offers countless other activities. The budding Thespian can try his talents either in the War College Footlighters, who this year did "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown," or with the Newport Players Guild. The guild produces several fine shows each season, and membership is open to anyone in the Newport area. This year's program included such standard favorites as "My Fair Lady" and "Romeo and Juliet." Musically in-

THOSE WERE THE DAYS 99

clined families might want to join the Navy Choristers, a singing ensemble made of naval personnel and their dependents. The Newport Jazz Festival has moved to New York, but other festivals and concerts, ranging from folk and hard rock to opera and classics, continue. During the summer the New-

port Music Festival gives concerts in the opulent setting of Newport mansions.

Newport, famed as the playground of the idle rich, guarantees fun for the War College family too. It is the rare officer or family who does not look upon their days at Newport with the nostalgia of "Those were the days."

— ψ —

Leisure is the mother of philosophy.

Thomas Hobbes: Leviathan, Part 2, Of Commonwealth