

LEONARD J. PANAGGIO

What would any city many times larger than Newport give for the couple of square miles that makes up the area we call the "Top of the Hill"? Its comfortable houses have been owned or occupied by such as Mrs. John Barrymore, Army General Walter Kreuger and countless naval officers among whom can be counted Raymond A. Spruance, Forrest B. Royal, Henry Kent Hewitt, William S. Sims, Walter R. Gherardi and James L. Kauffman. And also a Brazilian Embassy.

This little piece of earth houses the nation's oldest library building, Redwood Library (1748), the Newport Art Museum, extraordinary for a city of this size, and an outstanding country day school, St. Michael's.

St. Michael's was originally the summer residence of two sisters from Boston, Ellen and Ida Mason. They did not name their summer villa and their names seldom occurred in print.

They had been coming to Newport for many years. Their first summer home was destroyed by fire early in February, 1899. Valuable paintings, statuary and furniture collected during a period of many years in foreign countries were lost. Ellen Mason, the better known of the sisters, seemed to have been the name attached to the current building which was built a few years after the fire.

The low and rambling building's roof was covered with beautiful old Mexican terra cotta giving a wonderful charm reminiscent of southern California missions. The walls were built unusually thick from the designs of architects Messrs Hebbard & Gill of San Diego. This structural feature allowed the arched windows to be deeply recessed.

-M O R E-

The main entrance, beneath of porte cochere, opened directly into a large semi-detached vestibule. Beyond was a spacious reception hall with its large sliding French windows which opened to the east on to a red quarried tile terrace. A broad passageway led to the dining room, while just off this passageway and to the eastward was the 18 by 32 feet dining room with two large arched windows and a large Inglenook fireplace with seats coming out from either side.

On the south side were the entrances to the library and the beginning of a wide, easy rising stairway. The walls of the hallway were wainscotted in ash-stained oak to the height of eight feet. The frieze was of colored plaster and the ceiling was heavily beamed with rough plaster between. The plain pilasters had simple carved capitals of Spanish-Renaissance design.

The dining room had two large arched windows facing east. On the north side was the fireplace and mantel. To the left of this the door led to the butler's pantry, and on the right a wide French window that opened to the chimney room loggia. To the west was a sideboard and sliding doors that opened into the main hall and drawing room. The room was finished in ash-stained natural oak and was wainscotted five feet high with very large panels.

Among other rooms were the kitchen, servants' hall, laundry, drying room and a servants' porch. The second floor had rooms for members of the family and guests. The servants' chambers were over the kitchen and the attic's space was left for future rooms, if needed.

Landscaping of the acreage was by the landscape architects of Brookline, Mass., the Olmstead Brothers.

Ellen Mason lived at the Rhode Island villa for more than 50 years. She died at her Walnut Street Boston winter residence in April, 1930. Her personal estate was valued at \$1,826,668. However, she left millions to charities and to various Newport benefactors including the then Family Welfare Society.

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