



# **Top of the Hill Newsletter**

## **Spring 2024**

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Interested in Historical Newport & Our Special Top of the Hill Past?

Take a look at our rich past on our History Page.

Neighborhood Articles, Loads of Newport Feature & Documentary Videos,  
House Stories, Great Reference Books...explore what's there!

Visit our History Page at:

<https://www.topofthehillnewport.org/history>

## President's Letter by Laurie Love

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Happy Spring everyone! A warm return welcome to all those who have been enjoying the warmer climates down south and out west. It's wonderful to see the temperatures warm here in Newport and to see the million+ daffodils blooming around our neighborhood and throughout our wonderful city!

We hope many of our members have been able to take part in one of the Spring Events. Mike's Historic Walking Tours always fill up quickly, but please know that they will be repeated if we have people waitlisted or there is interest for another tour – as we did for the latest “Summer Villas Before Vanderbilt Era” Tour. He is repeating his Island Cemetery Tour on Saturday, May 11<sup>th</sup> and we've again arranged for a private tour of the restored Belmont Chapel. Check out the Events calendar – we post before we promote, so you can see what's coming. Lots of activities in June to kick off the summer!

Our Annual Spring Forum will be held at the Newport Library taking place on Monday, May 13<sup>th</sup>. Both our Second Ward Councilman, Charlie Holder and Mayor, Xay Khamsyvoravong will be there to speak and answer questions. This is a wonderful opportunity to engage directly with Xay and Charlie. Thanks to our Community Chair, Harry Elkin, for organizing and managing this always popular event. Further information may be found on the Events Page of the website.

The Luce Park Spring Clean Up was completed on April 20<sup>th</sup> just in time for Earth Day – enjoy a visit on your next walk. The park was already looking quite pretty with the front corner's new bulbs in full bloom and the rear shrubs starting to bud. The team edged the flower beds, did a lot of weeding, and distributed a huge pile of mulch giving the park a nice finished and cared for look. Thanks again to all those caring members who help keep Top of the Hill among the most beautiful neighborhoods in Newport and for taking part in those wet conditions – great community spirit!

We have many fun events and group activities coming this summer, so please stay tuned and join some groups. Interested in Full Moon Bike Rides, Tree Conservancy Walks, Concerts in the Park, Paddle Boarding, Movies at JPT, Wine Tasting Parties? These are just some of the Group activities. Remember, the Groups and Membership pages are private, so only members see other member names – internet security is top of mind. Sign into your website account on the [Members Page](#) and take a moment to review the Groups Page...see what may be of interest!

Lastly, please save the date of Saturday, June 29<sup>th</sup> for our Summer Garden Party. Members commented that they like the party early in the season, so they have most of the summer to look forward to, so we've moved the date forward. It's sure to be another outstanding event. We'll be posting the event shortly with details on the invite – fun for the whole family!

Again, Happy Spring to all and special wishes for a fabulous Mother's Day to all the Moms!!

See you soon!  
Laurie

## Community Corner by Harry Elkin

We are well on our way to putting together an informative Community Forum, scheduled for next Monday, May 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m. in the Friends Meeting Room of the Newport Public Library. We have invited back our well received speakers from last year, Mayor Xay Khamsyvoravong and 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward Councilor, Charlie Holder and by now you should have received an invitation to attend along with the opportunity to provide us with input on issues you would like to hear about.

These forums, and this will be the 14th year we've been doing them, are an ideal opportunity to meet with the various people who run this City for us, to share with them our opinions and needs and to hear from them their perspectives of the issues which face us. This year will be no different, and I would urge you to visit the Events section of the website where you can read more about this year's talking points and sign up to attend and give input, if you want.

Looking forward to seeing you there on the 13<sup>th</sup>. Harry

## Councilor's Corner by Second Ward Councilman, Charlie Holder

Happy Spring everyone!

I'd like to start this quarterly column by saying how much I'm looking forward to the Q & A session we will be having on May 13<sup>th</sup> at the Newport Public Library. This will be my third meeting with all of you and I can tell you these meetings are so extremely helpful. It's rare that we can all meet together and have a open and robust face to face conversation on the issues that we face in Newport, specifically the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward. Once again, Mayor Xay will be joining me on the stage this year.

We have so much happening in our fair City in 2024. We are dealing with a new budget for FY 2024-25, search for a City Manager, Easton's Beach decisions and property revaluations just to name a few.

By the time this column is printed you may already have heard that we contracted 1899, LLC to manage the beach food & beverage concessions for this Summer. I really feel this is the best deal for Newport, not only from an economic standpoint but it will also allow beach goers more options for food then they have had in the past. We are also working on having the bathhouses available for residents.

We also have some important bills coming before the State house & senate committees. Most importantly the \$98.5 million dollar bond. This bond, should it pass the General Assembly, will go before the voters in November. Passage of this bond will allow us to put money towards major projects including beach renourishment, resiliency efforts and infrastructure improvement.

Once again, I can't wait for the 13<sup>th</sup>. These types of "town hall" meetings are a great way for you as residents and us as representatives to get together and have a robust and informational conversation about what is happening in our neighborhood.

## Gardening Corner by Claire O'Donnelly

### Spring Gardening on the Hill

Spring has returned and the daffodils too! I feel that they are especially beautiful this year. Spring is my favorite gardening season, though not my favorite season, which is actually fall! But more on that another time. Although the weather has been really variable, there have still been a few good clean up days. I always find it easier to clear out last year's debris when the daffodils are filling the garden with sunshine. It is as though the garden is already taking care of itself, showing me that my efforts will be rewarded. It is very satisfying indeed to cut back all of last year's dead stalks and stems. In particular, be sure to cut back your roses and to eliminate completely any branches that are crossing each other. If you are not sure about this, check out some YouTube videos. They are very helpful.

For this gardening newsletter, I want to talk about a few different things. First on my list is water. Having spent quite a few weeks in Arizona this winter, the topic of water was constantly brought up. Many places, Arizona included, are struggling to meet the needs of thirsty residents - human, animal and plant. Although we are not in that situation currently here in Rhode Island, it got me thinking that perhaps it is time to evaluate the way water is being used in our country and what part we can play in conservation. Yards can be very thirsty beasts if we let them. However, they do not have to be. The concept of lawns in every yard is actually relatively new. Of course, there have always been beautiful lawns and greens; Golf goes way way back! However, the idea that every home should have a manicured lawn was really a response to the prosperity that followed World War Two when there was a boom in home ownership. This was coupled with greater wealth and shorter work weeks and many families found themselves in a position to cultivate and tend to their lawns. I have to admit that I am a gardener with a lawn and I have definitely come to think of it as an essential part of my yard. However, it really does not have to be. I console myself by using sturdy local grass, watering as infrequently as possible, mowing high, and always mulching the clippings back into the grass. These simple steps help to salve my conscience!

Many people are choosing to let go of their lawns and are letting them revert to natural meadows. These meadows comprise plants that are native to the area. They are hardy and tolerant of local temperatures and rain. They require very little effort and very little in the way of water, maintenance, or fertilizers. The University of Rhode Island is a wonderful resource for all things garden. From their website to their hotline, to free soil testing, and even in person visits, they can really help with decisions about what to plant.

Next up is weeding. I often wonder why it is that the weeds are often the healthiest plants in my garden! It is definitely tempting to drag out the big name weed killers and spray everything in sight, but this is really not a good option in the long run. Chemical herbicides can be toxic to people and wildlife. They can get into our waterways, and no one wants that! So what are the alternatives? Perhaps the easiest way to limit weeds is to try to keep your garden as densely planted as possible. If your yard is brimming with desirable plants, there will be no room for weeds to grow. When weeds do try to pop up, you can pull them after rain when they will hopefully come out of the ground easily. If they are stubborn, try using something like a stirrup hoe or an action hoe. These have long handles and are not so hard on the back. Afterwards, if you mulch the area, the weeds will be much less likely to return. Mulching also has the added advantage of helping your garden to retain moisture. So win win.

Finally, I want to try to encourage all of you with gardens to convert a small area over to edible plants. When it comes to food there are as many favorites as there are people, so plant what you love. If you have children or grandchildren, edible gardens can be a great way to teach them about where food comes from and the effort it takes to produce healthy, nourishing food. In my experience, all children love to see plants grow. Especially those that they have planted themselves. You might want to take the lesson one step further and introduce them to composting also. I just brought my Calla Lillies out of hibernation and have pots all over my kitchen - much to my husband's dismay! I almost planted them outside but resisted, and I am so glad I did after the frosty spell we had last week. The reason I bring this up is because each morning I rush into the kitchen like it is Christmas morning to see if any more green shoots have pushed through the soil! So even big kids get a thrill out of seeing things grow!

I hope, like me, you are excited for the gardening season ahead. Think about what you want your garden to achieve this year and plant accordingly! I hope you will be mindful of native plants and also water and fertilizer. But most of all, I hope you will have fun in the garden.

Happy gardening, plant people! Till Summer, Claire

## Membership Corner by Anne Marie Biernacki-Smith

### Member Website Accounts

Please don't forget to create your website account on the [Members Page](#) if you have not already done so. It's super easy - less time than registering for an online event or buying a movie ticket!

Sign up with Email / Create your Password / Confirm your Email - Done!

**Every member and/or couple needs a website account.**

This will enable you to:

- RSVP to Events
- Join Groups/Create Group Events
- Message Fellow Members
- Share Community Information with Forum Posts
- Receive All Event Promotions along with Forum & Group Notifications

Don't miss out on all those fun Group Events! Anne Marie

## Discovering the History of Newport

### A Guide to the City's Street Names and Landmarks

The streets and landmarks of Newport are rich in more than three hundred years of history, triumphs, and tribulations. Look no further than the street names around Newport for a quick history and tip of the hat to some of Newport's original founders, heroes, and early settlers.

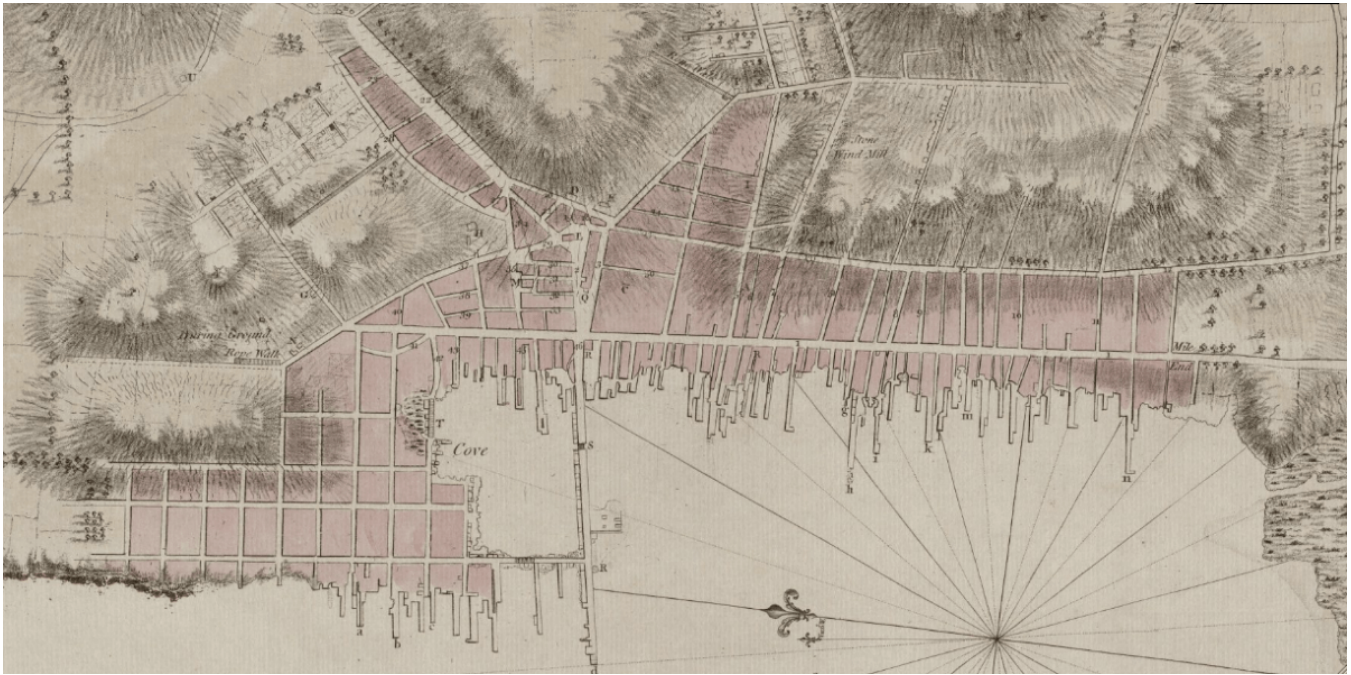


Photo: Boston Public Library, Norman B. Leventhal Map Center

The streets and landmarks of Newport are filled with stories from over 300 years of history. From the founders and heroes to the early settlers, the names of these streets and landmarks pay tribute to the rich history of this city.

### **Aquidneck Island**

“Aquidneck” is derived from the Narragansett name for the island, aquidnet. The word literally means “floating-mass-at” or simply “at the island”. Other sources claim Aquidneck is a Native word meaning “Isle of Peace.”

Source: [Rhode Island Geography](#) & Henry Schoolcraft, [The American Indians](#)

### **America’s Cup Avenue**

Dedicated to the most famous sailing race, America’s Cup, that was hosted in Newport, RI from 1930 – 1983.

Source: [12 Meter Charters](#)

### **Ballard Park**

In 1990 Carol C. Ballard donated a thirteen acre parcel of open space to the City of Newport “for the enjoyment of all Newport’s residents” thus creating Ballard Park. Carol envisioned the site would serve as an outdoor laboratory for area students and a place where the local public could connect with nature.

Source: [Friends of Ballard Park](#)

### **Bannister's Wharf**

The Wharf John Bannister built was the social and commercial lifeline to colonial Newport, the connector between an active harbor and an enterprising, young town.

Source: [The History of Bannister's Wharf](#)

### **Bellevue Avenue**

Many believe that Bellevue is derived from a French term for "beautiful view."

### **Bowen's Wharf**

Bowen's Wharf was originally known as Stevens' Wharf, after Robert Stevens Ship Chandler. This shop was next owned by George Piltz and served as the office for the George Bowen's Coal Company. The Robert Stevens mansion was at the corner of Bowen's Wharf and Thames Street, and was a unique double house design

### **Brenton Point**

The point was named after [Governor William Brenton](#) (c. 1610–1674), an early settler, who owned the land as a large farm in the 17th century.

Brenton originally called the area "Hammersmith" after his hometown in England. The original name survives in the name of Hammersmith Farm, an estate on the point later owned by the family of First Lady Jackie Kennedy Onassis.

Source: [Rhode Island State Parks 1976](#).

### **Cardines Field**

The Basin Field ballpark was renamed for Bernardo Cardines, a Newport baseball player who was Newport's first citizen to die in World War I.

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

### **Channing Memorial Church**

Built as a memorial to William Ellery Channing, a Newport native who is widely seen as the founder of modern Unitarianism in America, the church and the congregation has been at the forefront of the Unitarian Universalist tradition here in the United States since its beginnings.

Source: [Channing Memorial Church](#)

### **Clarke School Apartments & The United Baptist Church (John Clarke Memorial)**

Named after [Dr. John Clarke](#) (1609-1676) one of the original purchasers and proprietors of the island, founders of Newport and one of the founders of the First Baptist Church in Newport, its first pastor, and munificent benefactor.

Source: *Asher, Louis Franklin (1997). John Clarke (1609–1676): Pioneer in American Medicine, Democratic Ideals, and Champion of Religious Liberty. Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing Company. ISBN 0-8059-4040-5.*



### **Claiborne Pell Bridge**

The Newport Bridge was renamed for U.S. Senator Claiborne Pell in 1992.

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

### **Coddington Highway, Coddington Brewery, Coddington Cemetery, Coddington Cove & Coddington Point**

The five landmarks are named after [William Coddington](#) (c. 1601 – 1 November 1678), one of the original eight founders and first officers of Newport, RI.

Source: *Bicknell, Thomas Williams (1920). The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations 3. New York: The American Historical Society. pp. 975–989.*

### **Coggeshall Avenue**

Named after [John Coggeshall](#) (1601 – 27 November 1647), one of the founders of Rhode Island and the first President of all four towns in the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

Other places named for President Coggeshall include John Coggeshall Elementary School in Portsmouth, Rhode Island; Coggeshall Way and Coggeshall Circle in rural Middletown; and Coggeshall Avenue in Newport, which goes through the original Coggeshall property.

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

### **Easton's Beach and Easton's Point**

These two locations were named after [Nicholas Easton](#) (c.1593–1675), one of the eight founders and original officers. In Newport, Easton became active in civil affairs, serving as assistant to the governor for several years, and in 1650 was elected President of the four towns of the colony.

Following his first presidency, the colony was split in 1651 by William Coddington who wanted the two island towns to be under a separate government, and who went to England to get the authority to do this. In 1654 the four towns were reunited, and Easton was once again elected President, presiding for another year over the united colony.

Source: *Bicknell, Thomas Williams (1920). [The History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations](#). Vol.3. New York: The American Historical Society. pp. 998–1001. Retrieved 2011-04-16*

### **Fort Adams**

Fort Adams, established on July 4, 1799, was named for then-incumbent President John Adams.

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

### **Goat Island**

Narragansett Native Americans called the island “Nante Sinunk”, and sold the island in 1658. Early Newport colonists used the island as a goat pasture.

Source: [A History of Goat Island, Newport, Rhode Island](#)

### **Hammersmith Farm**

It was erected on what had been originally known as “Hammersmith Island,” possibly named after the English hometown of William Brenton, the 17th-century governor of Rhode Island who established the first farm on the site in 1640.

Source: Brenton, Elizabeth C. (1877). [History of Brenton’s Neck from 1638](#). Newport, RI: John P. Sanborn, Printer, Mercury Office.

### **Rose Island**

The name of the island is allegedly named “Rose Island” because at low tide the island appears to be shaped like a rose

Source: [Rose Island Light info](#)

### **Salve Regina University**

Salve Regina is a Latin term which translates as “Hail, (Holy) Queen”, a Marian hymn and one of four Marian antiphons sung at different seasons within the Christian liturgical calendar of the Catholic Church.

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

### **Thames Street**

The street takes its name from the Thames River in London, England, an area from which many of the early colonists migrated. Today local residents pronounce the street name with a hard “th” and which rhymes with “names” rather than the British pronunciation of “temz.”

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

### **The Point**

The evidence of the large number of Quakers who settled in Newport in the 17th century can be seen today in the fact that many streets in the “[The Point](#)” are named after trees (Elm, Poplar, Willow, Walnut, Chestnut, Cherry, Pine, Sycamore, and Cypress).

[Marsh Street](#) was formerly the site of a marsh and [Bridge Street](#), the site of a bridge traversing the north side of the marsh

Source: [Wikipedia](#)

### **Touro Park, Touro Synagogue & Touro Street**

The Touro Synagogue was built from 1759 to 1763 for the Jeshuat Israel congregation in Newport under the leadership of Cantor (Chazzan) Isaac Touro.

Judah Touro’s lasting fame, however, was as a philanthropist. He contributed \$40,000—an immense sum at the time—to the Jewish cemetery at Newport, and bought the Old Stone Mill there, at that time thought to have been built by Norsemen, giving it to the city. The park surrounding it is still known as Touro Park.

In 1820, Abraham Touro had a brick wall built around the cemetery, and when he died in 1822 he bequeathed \$10,000 to the State of Rhode Island for the support and maintenance of the “Old Jewish Synagogue” in Newport. He made an additional bequest of \$5,000 for the maintenance of the street which runs from the cemetery down the hill to the synagogue building. As a result of his generosity, the street was named “Touro Street.” When the state legislature accepted Abraham’s gift, they were the first to publicly refer to the synagogue as “Touro (or Touro’s) Synagogue.”

Source: [Wikipedia](#) & [Touro Synagogue](#)

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Source: *What’s Up Newp* Article by Ryan Belmore

## Committee Opportunities

Our quarterly call to action ☺ We invite and encourage help on our committees. If you would like to get involved or learn more, please connect with the respective Committee Chair(s) noted below via the Members Chat on the website or email us at: [tohnewport@gmail.com](mailto:tohnewport@gmail.com)

### **Committee Chairs:**

Community – Harry Elkin

Events – Susan Kelleher & Claire O’Donnelly (Co-Chairs)

Membership – Anne Marie Biernacki-Smith

Welcome – Susan McCoy

Beautification – Wayne Glazier

Website/Communications – Laurie Love

We would love to hear from you!

# Photo Gallery

**March 9 & March 30, 2024: Historical Walking Tours – Summer Villas before the Vanderbilt Era**



**April 14, 2024: Nature Walk at the Norman Bird Sanctuary**



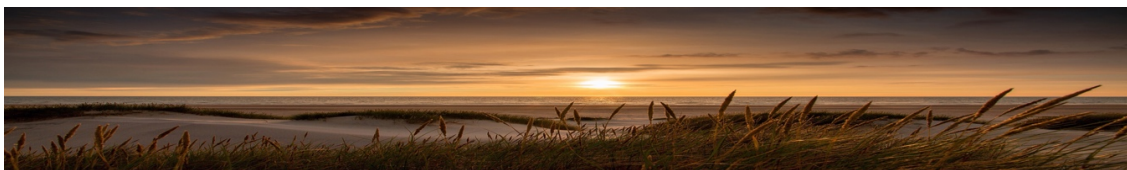
**April 20, 2023: Luce Park Spring Clean Up – The Pile...Going...Going...Gone!**



**Other Events:**

**March 24, 2024: Newport Strings Community Concert at Ochre Court**

**April 6, 2024: The Breakers Tour During Newport Community Days**



<https://www.topofthehillnewport.org/>