

George H. Norman and Belair - Old Beach Road

George H. Norman was a prominent figure in Newport society during the mid and late 19th century. Born in Newport, Norman made his fortune as a civil engineer and creator/owner of the Newport Water Works, which included Easton's Pond. He also was an engineer for other water works projects in New England and the Midwest. In fact, the highest honor given by the American Society of Civil Engineers today, America's oldest, is the Norman Medal. His greater claims to local Newport fame were of course his founding of the Newport Daily News in 1846 and his daughter Mabel's 1949 founding of the Norman Bird Sanctuary, named in his honor.

In 1851 Norman purchased a new home which was originally built for New York oil baron H. Allen Wright located on Buena Vista, or what we now call Old Beach Road. It was only one of four original houses on "The Hill." The property was made up of four acres of land; the original stone walls still outline much of the old property. At the time it would have had a commanding view of Easton's Pond. The home itself was designed by local architect Seth Bradford, the mastermind behind Chateau-sur-Mer, Rockry Hall, and a handful of other stone homes still standing in Newport. When Norman purchased the home, he made many additions and alterations to the property. This included a high convex mansard tower and stables in 1870, as well as a gate lodge in 1875. The stables and gate lodge are really something spectacular architecturally. These additions were added by local architect Dudley Newtown whose unique designs can be found throughout Newport including his own studio on Bellevue Avenue.

George H. Norman died in February 1900 at the age 73 leaving a lasting legacy to Newport and his nine children! Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. even attended his funeral at Trinity Church and his burial in Island Cemetery. Even after Norman's death the original Newport Water Works remained in the family until the city purchased it in the 1930's. Belair remained in the family through his son Reginald Norman, a veteran of the Spanish American War and World War I. Reggie would also serve on the staff of two Rhode Island governors, Dyer and Lippitt. After his passing the house reverted to his wife until her death in 1965. By 1966 the contents of the home were auctioned off and the property subdivided into condominiums. Today it is a beautiful reminder of the grandeur that once was, and in some cases still is the top of the hill.



Belair Mansion



Belair Carriage House



Belair Gate Lodge