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Jennifer Lalli
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Honors Project

Newport Restoration Foundation's Historic Houses of The Point

Newport, Rhode Island is a city with a great historical background, including involvement in the Revolutionary War and the Underground Railroad. It contains many important historical buildings, such as Touro Synagogue (the oldest synagogue in the country), the Colony House (which served as the seat of government for the colony of Rhode Island and the state of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations), and the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (the oldest house in Newport). The focus of this project is the historic homes in the Point section of Newport, which were restored in the 1960's and 1970's by the Newport Restoration Foundation, which was established by Doris Duke in 1968. This paper supplements my photographic series "A Study Guide to Newport Restoration Foundation's Historic Houses of 'The Point.'"

The Point section of Newport was chosen as the focus of this project because the area has both significant historical value and personal value, as I am a life-long resident of the Point. When these homes were built in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the area was an important haven for religious freedom. In fact, it was because of the Jews and Quakers, who were expelled from surrounding areas, that Newport was transformed from a small agricultural society to one of the five main seaports during the eighteenth century. Religious tolerance coupled with the prime location on trading routes encouraged prominent merchants and craftsmen to settle in the city. Such craftsmen included furniture makers, cabinetmakers, shipbuilders and silversmiths, among others.

The city of Newport itself was often at the forefront of important advances in the colonies such as becoming the first city to name its streets and have a map. This encouraged trade while aiding visitors. People from all classes were involved with the economy, which was based around many different activities including shipping, slave trade and furniture making. Many young men joined the crews of ships based out of Newport. By 1712, Newport had more than a dozen shipyards. The port was also actively involved in the slave trade, with approximately one-third of middle class families owning at least one slave, according to the 1774 census. Newport also had a rapidly growing population, more than doubling from 2800 people to 6200 people, between 1742 and 1774. It was because of the increases in commerce and population that there was a great demand for housing in Newport, many of which have survived to the present day.[1]

Logistics of the Study guide

The homes selected for inclusion in the study guide are those that are designated as 'Historic Homes' by the Newport Restoration Foundation, both in their records and online (http://www.newportrestoration.com/historic/historic.html). Another factor that influenced inclusion was whether there is significant information regarding the history of the house available. For example, if the only information available was the style of architecture and floor plan, it was not included, because that simply tells of the time when the home was built, not about the people who lived there. All homes included in the study guide were also restored as part of a project established by Doris Duke under the auspices of her Newport Restoration Foundation.

[1] C.P.B. Jefferys, *Newport: A Short History* (Newport Historical Society, 1998), 9-11.

Doris Duke selected these particular houses because she could see the historical significance as well as the fact that many of the houses were becoming run down and dilapidated. Duke saw the homes in Newport as having great historical significance and formed the Newport Restoration Foundation in response to this issue. She chose to preserve those homes that dated back to colonial times in an effort to restore the history of Newport and bring the area back from the slum that it was becoming.

The sequence of the study guide is based on an alphabetical and numerical system. The streets themselves are listed in alphabetical order with the houses on that street in numerical order. By ordering the houses in this manner, it is very easy to find a specific house, even if the person looking at the study guide is not familiar with the area. This system also makes it easy for middle school and high school students, the target group, to locate information about a specific house that they want to know more about.

Doris Duke and the Newport Restoration Foundation

Doris Duke, heiress to the fortune amassed by her father, James Buchanan Duke, founder of the American Tobacco Company and Duke Energy Company, was born November 22, 1912, and was immediately dubbed the "Million-Dollar Baby". Upon the death of her father in 1925, at the tender age of 13, Doris Duke inherited $100 million and became known as the richest girl in the world. She led a privileged and extravagant life, making her summer and fall residence at the estate known as Rough Point in Newport, Rhode Island. Her time at Rough Point introduced her to the rich architectural history of Newport's neighborhoods, particularly the Point and Historic Hill neighborhoods.

Although Doris Duke lived a life of excess and was at times mired in controversy, she was well known as a philanthropist, forming her first foundation at the age of twenty-one. It is believed that one such controversy in 1966 led to the formation of a foundation that has forever changed the face of these neighborhoods. On October 6, 1966, Doris Duke got behind the wheel of her vehicle and accelerated as her companion, Eduardo Tirella, opened the large iron gates of her Newport estate. He was crushed against the gates, dragged across the street and killed instantly. It has been speculated that following a brief investigation, a "deal concerning Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF) was cut the night of the accident."[2]

The Newport Restoration Foundation was established in 1968 to acquire and restore eighteenth century residences in order to preserve the rapidly deteriorating but nonetheless rich architectural heritage of Newport. The foundation embarked on a fifteen-year restoration project that renewed historically significant neighborhoods, once the home to sea captains, cabinetmakers and merchants that had become rundown and dilapidated. Doris Duke stepped in at a time when there was much political pressure to update and modernize. "Furthermore, historic preservation was sharply threatened by redevelopment and the perceived need for new and bigger roads, a movement promoted by a politically powerful segment of the population."[3]

This undertaking by Doris Duke and her Newport Restoration Foundation was one of the biggest neighborhood historic preservation projects resulting in one of the largest collections of period architecture by one organization in the country. Her

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[2] "Doris Duke," *Newport Notables,* accessed at http://www.redwoodlibrary.org/notables/duke.htm on March 10, 2007

[3] "History of Rough Point," *Newport Restoration Foundation*, accessed at http://www.newportrestoration.com/pr/nrfhistory.html on March 10, 2007

impressive wealth and her foresight provided the project with the resources necessary to complete a venture that most would find overwhelming. Eighty-three structures have been preserved, restored and retained by the Newport Restoration Foundation. Doris Duke took this work so seriously that she personally tended to the most minute details of the restoration projects. At the time of purchase, the price for these properties was as much as twenty thousand dollars with most requiring as much as seventy to eighty thousand dollars in restoration costs. A full compliment of craftsmen was brought together to orchestrate this undertaking. This included consultants and architects as well as seventy to eighty trade professionals such as carpenters, painters and a woodworking mill crew. After complete restoration, these properties rarely had a market value of more that fifty thousand dollars. They are now known among Newport locals simply as Duke Houses.

Newport Restoration Foundation has retained ownership and meticulously maintained these properties as rental properties. "Not insignificantly, rents in the Duke houses have been traditionally lower than Newport's rents, which are high for Rhode Island."[4] Although the Newport Restoration Foundation has preserved the historical integrity of the restored houses, Doris Duke believed that they should also be livable. "She took the preservation of Colonial houses in Newport to a heroic level. She had the drive and the vision to take it to the next level."[5]

One of the original intents of the Newport Restoration Foundation was to "seed preservation into the community."[6] As a result of the efforts of this restoration project,

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[4] Elizabeth Abbott, "In Newport, the Many-Faceted Legacy of Doris Duke," *New York Times* (September 7, 1997).
[5] Abbott, "In Newport."
[6] "History of Rough Point."

the foundation hoped that other members of the community would recognize the benefits of this work and follow suit. It is apparent, when one looks at these neighborhoods today, that this intention has been fulfilled. Since the commencement of this project most of the homes in these neighborhoods have had significant restoration work – a true example of the domino effect. Private preservation projects continue to flourish throughout these neighborhoods. "The Newport Restoration Foundation's vision is to carry its expertise and standards out into the community so that Newport's remarkable legacy will remain on view and open for study to future generations." It is with this vision in mind that I have chosen to create a study guide to the historic homes of the Point neighborhood that have been restored by Doris Duke's Newport Restoration Foundation. This study guide is intended for use in middle school and high school social studies programs.

A Brief History of Newport, Rhode Island

Newport, Rhode Island was founded in 1639. Who the founding fathers were is debatable. Some claim that the founder was Roger Williams. In the mid 1600s, Williams was expelled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for promoting his belief that people should be allowed to practice the religion and worship the God of their choice. In advocating this belief, Williams rejected the stringent constraints of the Protestant reformers who colonized early America and their intolerance towards religious freedom.[7] Others claim that it was a small group of people lead by William Coddington and John Clark, who initially left the Massachusetts Bay Colony settlement of Boston because of

[7] Gary J. Band, "Touro Synagogue: A Journey Back in Time," *Jewish Journal* (February 18, 2000), accessed at http://www.jewishjournal.org/archives/archiveFeb18_00.htm on March 10, 2007

religious differences with the Puritans.[8] Still others say it was Anne Hutchinson, who had been banned from Massachusetts because she questioned the fundamental beliefs of Puritanism. Regardless of the identity of the founder or founders, Newport was established in an effort to escape the limitations of the Puritan faith and to establish the precedent of religious toleration in the British colonies.

Newport became the epicenter for religious pluralism and the home to several diverse religious centers of worship, such as the first Quaker Meeting House, the oldest Episcopal parish, the first synagogue, called Touro Synagogue, and the first free black church. These religious groups coexisted peacefully and Newport became a melting pot for diverse religious beliefs. One of the main attractions of Newport was the ability to practice any religion. The settlers of Newport and their descendants had found a way in which to coexist peacefully regardless of their belief system. Newport was one of the first secular democracies in the new world.

The Quakers had a large influence on both the religion and architectural style. By 1700, more than half of the population of Newport was Quakers. Due to the large number of Quakers, they dominated almost everything, from social to political influence and just about everything in between. Because the Quakers believed in such a simple way of life, oftentimes their architecture was simple as well. Other influential religious groups included the Baptists and the Jews. While the Jews first started settling in Newport in the 1650s, they began making significant contributions to the economic and cultural aspects of Newport in the 1750s. The reason for their late blooming was the fact that when the colony of Rhode Island (and the city of Newport) was established, Jews

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[8] "Coddington, William," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition (2006), accessed at http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1E1-Coddingt.html on March 10, 2007

were not seen as equal to the Quakers and Baptists and could not vote. The Baptists made their most significant contribution to the governmental system, promoting their belief of separation of church and state, thus establishing the secular democracy.

Newport grew into a vibrant center for maritime commerce. Agriculture, thanks to fertile soil, thrived. With what appeared to be an endless supply of fish, the fishing industry boomed. The desires to sell and transport their surplus goods to other colonies lead Newport to become involved in the shipbuilding industry. "By 1739, Newport merchants operated more than 100 large ships. By 1769, merchants throughout the Narragansett Bay area owned 200 vessels engaged in foreign trade and another 300 to 400 used in coastal traffic."[9] By the late 1700's, Newport was among the five wealthiest and leading ports in colonial North America, along with Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. Trade prospered in Newport as its citizens produced and exported silver, rum, furniture, fish, candles and other commodities, along with participating in the black slave trade.

Other prominent trades included cabinet making, silver smithing, and furniture making, among others. In fact, the area of Easton's Point (today know as The Point), which was mainly inhabited by the Quakers, was the address of the Townsend and Goddard families, some of the best-known furniture makers in America. All of this prosperity lead to a building boom, with hundreds of houses built in Newport, many of which survive today in the Point section. These houses were built by prominent Newporters such as William Coddington, Gideon Wanton, and Martha Pittman. Coddington served as a judge of Newport and governor of Rhode Island.

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[9] "A Brief History of Jamestown and Newport, Rhode Island," http://www.jamestown-ri.info/18th_century_history.htm on March 10, 2007.

Newport was the largest city in Rhode Island until the American Revolution, when a British occupation caused most of the city's residents to flee to Providence, where they could find safety. The British chose to occupy Newport because the area was well known for its opposition to royal efforts to control their trade. Before the occupation, however, there were trade restrictions placed on the city, specifically on brown sugar and molasses. When a Newport trader's ship was seized in 1775, though containing rum and plain sugar which were legal to trade, British Captain James Wallace took it upon himself to take corrective action against the trader. This began a year long attack against Newport, with constant threats of burning the city. Although he never actually burned the city down, he did periodically open fire on the town.[10]

After Wallace spent about a year threatening the people of Newport, the British launched the occupation of Newport. The occupation lasted from 1776 to 1779, with the French finally driving away the British. The French then stayed in Newport until 1781. While the British occupied Newport, they destroyed many of the buildings that had shaped the city; remarkably Touro Synagogue was saved. In fact, of the one thousand homes that were in Newport prior to the occupation, only approximately four hundred were left standing after the British left.

Architecture of the Point

Newport has an unusually rich architectural heritage; however the eighteenth century was Newport's most brilliant early period of building. Its unique character is evident in rows of small, well preserved and restored eighteenth century homes. These homes share a coherent architectural style, and boast sturdy construction. They are

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[10] Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island in the Revolutionary Era*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 121-123.

ornamental but not considered to be lavish. They were the homes of sea captains, small farmers, dockworkers, merchants, shopkeepers and furniture makers.

These homes did and still do communicate a way of life. One must consider all aspects of these homes to have a better understanding of the total picture. Each component - the actual home, gardens, out buildings as well as the street tells something about the times in which they were built.[11]

The homes that are discussed in the study guide that I have designed are all eighteenth century homes that have been restored by Doris Duke's Newport Restoration Foundation discussed earlier. They are all in a neighborhood formerly known as Easton's Point, now known simply as The Point. These homes are all in close proximity to Newport Harbor, once a bustling seaport that provided the backdrop to a mainstay in Newport's commerce.

Many are on what is now known as Washington Street but in the eighteenth century the street was known appropriately as Water Street. It is the street that is closest to the harbor. It was the center of Newport's shipping business. Shipping also referred to the trading of slaves, rum and molasses. These shippers not only had their homes here but also built wharves out into the harbor that had shops. Most had gardens where they grew their own tobacco. Water Street was also the home of the first free school, which was located at the corner of Marsh Street.

Another street, where many of the restored homes are located that are included in this project, is Bridge Street, formerly known as Shipwright's Street. It was so named for the many ship's carpenters who lived there during the eighteenth century. The Townsend

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[11] Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully, *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island: 1640 – 1915* (New York: American Legacy Press, 1967), 3-5.

and Goddard families, now world-renowned furniture craftsmen, built several homes on Shipwright's Street so they cold directly ship their furniture. With increased commercial activity came wealth and with wealth came the desire for homes built in popular European styles.

Prior to the American Revolution there were approximately 1100 dwellings in Newport. Approximately one third of these dwellings were burned as firewood by British soldiers during the two unusually cold winters. Four hundred pre-revolutionary homes still exist throughout Newport with one hundred of these homes still standing in The Point.[12] Twenty-five of these homes are owned by the Newport Restoration Foundation and comprise the accompanying study guide. These homes have similar characteristics. They are all clapboard, shingle or a combination of both. Most sit at the edge of the sidewalk and many are sideways on the lot. These houses fall into one of three architectural styles: Georgian, Greek Revival and Federal.

Georgian architecture, prominent from 1700 to 1776, actually refers to a period and not necessarily a style however it is commonly called a style. The Georgian period is a reference to the time that the three King Georges were in power in Britain. Georgian style houses were essentially formal types of houses based on perfect symmetry. The exterior walls of the Georgian style homes in the Newport Restoration Foundation project were constructed of clapboard. Sometimes wider boards were used at the bottom then narrowing toward the top of the house. It is believed that this gave the illusion of height.[13] In other areas brick was used, however it was not widely accessible in this area.

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[12] Downing and Scully, *The Architectural Heritage*, 5.
[13] Hugh Morrison, *American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1987), 304.

Homes with Georgian architecture have a prominent, centrally located door. Although most of the homes in the restoration project do not have a centrally located door, the other features and the years that they were built lend them to the Georgian style. Typically the doors were comprised of multiple panels and were of a generous width. Pediments were frequently found on Georgian style homes. These were made in many shapes such as flat, curved or angled with the most common being a triangular shape decorated with different types of moldings. Pediments were sometimes split in the middle. Around the doors were casings or pilasters that framed the doorway. These could be the full height of the door or raised on pedestals. Between the door and the pediment it was common to have a transom with small windows called lights. This allowed light to enter to hallway of the home. "In general, Georgian doorways had a masculine quality, with vigorous moldings and burly forms, in contrast to the more fragile detail of the Federal period."[14]

Sash windows that used a system of cords, pulleys and counterweights were the windows of choice during the Georgian period. Examples of early Georgian windows had as many as 24 small panes of glass in each window. Later in the century, as glass became more plentiful, larger panes replaced the smaller panes and 12 panes per window became the standard. Windows were sometimes topped with small flat cornices.

Dormers were a common feature in Georgian style homes allowing for living space on the top floor or attic of the home. Dormers were narrow and topped with a gable or pediment.

With the influence of the Georgian style, roofs became less pitched than the previous colonial period roofs. The most prevalent Georgian roof style was the hipped

[14] Morrison, *American Architecture,* 302.

roof although the gable and gambrel style roofs were more commonly seen in the examples from Newport. Cornices and dentil moldings were popular embellishments, replacing the more simple eaves found on colonial homes. Balustrades often formed a "captain's walk" on the flat part of a hipped roof although this style was not prevalent in the homes of the Newport Restoration Foundation's restoration project of Point homes. A fine example of a hipped roof from the study guide is the Kings Arms Tavern located at 6 Cross Street.

Chimneys were a basic rectangular shape with simple molded cornices at the top. The pilasters of the previous colonial styling were eliminated. In the Newport examples, the chimneys were all central chimneys, however, end chimneys were also used in some Georgian styling. This type of chimney can be clearly seen in the photograph of the Hathaway-Macomber House, which is located at 57 Thames Street.

Less prominent in the homes featured in the study guide, but nonetheless important, is the Federal style of architecture. This style, which became popular from 1780 to 1830, followed the end of the American Revolution. The main difference in the Federal style is the softening of some features such as delicate columns and moldings.

Exterior walls had a smooth, even façade. In Newport, the exteriors were for the most part wood. Brick was not readily available as there were no brick foundries. Pastel colors were being used on the exterior of homes.

Most of the exterior detail was found in the doorway. Fanlights came to replace transom lighting and are often found at the top of doors in examples of Federal architecture. Half round porticos became popular and pediments were still widely used in doorways. Sidelights were a common feature during this time. The Martha G. Pittman

House located at 59 Bridge Street and photographed in the study guide, illustrates the ornate doorway and fanlights common to Federal style architecture.

Lower level windows were taller and featured more glass. Glass was now being manufactured in America and became much more readily available. Lintels, which are horizontal structures just above a window and keystones, which are wedge shaped pieces in the center of the lintel, are indicative of the Federal style. The interpretation of Roman design by Andrea Palladia can be see in this style through the use of Palladian windows in some of the larger homes of wealthier people of the time although not common in the Point neighborhood. Palladian windows have large arched windows above the rectangular windows. Roofs in the Federal style were built with a lower pitch or flat.

The final style of architecture represented in this project is Greek Revival, which was popular from 1800 to 1860. The homes of the Greek Revival era were rectangular and usually symmetrical in design. This style is identified by its use of stark and severe exterior walls; however large, sometimes oversized columns are used. The exterior of these homes was most often painted white in an effort to emulate the marble of Greece.

Doorways featured narrow sidelights with smaller transom lights above the door. The doors were often in shallow recessed porches with large porticos that are supported by the columns. The doors and lights were also integrated with pediments and pilasters.

Some of the more commonly seen features include windows that were most often over sized, again reflective of the availability of glass. The most common configuration of windows in Greek Rival architecture is six over six, referring to the number of panes in each window sash. Roofs are gabled or hipped with low pitch. The cornices of the roofs characteristically had wide bands of molding usually made up of two parts. The

first is the frieze or middle section just below the cornice. Below the frieze is another structure called the architrave, which is Greek for main beam. Together the cornice, frieze and architrave are called an entablature. The entablature is supported by the columns. Some of these features, particularly the shallow recessed porch, can clearly be seen in the study guide on the William Gardner House located at 51 Bridge Street.

The city of Newport has a very rich history, from the Revolutionary War to the Underground Railroad and beyond. Also of great importance to the city are the houses left from those times in history. Though the architecture is simple due to the influence of the Quakers, it has withstood the test of time and allows a look back into the technologies and resources of the times. These houses provide us with an invaluable reference tool that Doris Duke saw as worth preserving and established a foundation to do so. Through the efforts of her foundation, the Newport Restoration Foundation, these homes will also be able to provide future generations a look into the rich cultural history of Newport, Rhode Island.

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