

# NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY MILL TOWN MESSENGER

THIS NEWSLETTER IS GENEROUSLY FUNDED BY SUGAR RIVER PHARMACY

Volume 10, Issue 2

April, 2016

## *From the President's Pen . . . .*



by Cathryn Baird

***“Nowadays everyone knows the cost of everything, but no one knows the value of anything.”***

Oscar Wilde, noted poet & playwright

Since the feature article of this newsletter is the closing of Towle School it seems appropriate to reflect on the relationship of the words “cost” and “value”.

Recently the rising cost of services and resulting increase in taxes has created financial and emotional meltdowns. No one likes closing a school or cutting town resources but the hard reality of cost containment and sustainability is driven by the value of numbers not the value of emotions and sentiment. The costs are objective and easy to determine by “crunching” the numbers. Value, on the other hand, is subjective and has many sentiments and variables.

School buildings provide a valued education of their own by offering a sense of place, identity, and security. Towle School is so much more than a stone edifice; it is a storehouse of almost a century of memories! Please help keep the memories alive by donating Towle memorabilia to the Newport Historical Society to be shared with future generations. The value of these memories is priceless.

So, here is an Irish blessing for the decision makers of Newport, The Sunshine Town, to consider: *“May you have the hindsight to know where you’ve been, the foresight to know where you are going and the insight to know when you’ve gone too far.”*

### Meeting & Program Times

*All members and the public are invited to all meetings and programs.*

#### **BUSINESS MEETINGS:**

NHS museum, 6:30-8 PM

**Mon. April 11**

**Mon. May 9**

**Mon. June 13**

**Mon. July 11**

#### **PROGRAMS:**

**Wed. May 11** - Business After Hours, Newport Chamber of Commerce, 5-7 PM

**Thu. June 16** - Visions of the Past Part 3, 6:30-8PM

Richards Library Ballroom

**Tue. July 12** - TBA

## **As I Recall: 1923 Towle School** *by Roger Small*

Originally published in the Argus-Champion, (September 8, 1999) - republished March, 2016

The architecture is modernized Elizabethan. The exterior is dark gray, mottled pressed brick from Waterloo, VA, and trimmings of Bedford, Indiana, buff limestone. The entire center section of the front elevation is in limestone with rich stone carvings. The main entrance architrave and spandrels are carved with acanthus and hawthorn leaves. All corners are formed with limestone quoins. The main entrance is nine feet wide, with marble floors in the vestibule and marble threads on the stairs.



One spring morning a few years ago, I encountered my old friend, Judge Harry Spanos, when I was on my morning walk. He was at the corner of Belknap Avenue, gazing over

at the above described structure, Towle High School.

“What great memories I have of that place,” he said in soft voice.

To those of us who went to high school there, it is more than a building. It’s a shrine. Now that I’m in the autumn or perhaps early winter of my life, I have taken some time to study its early life and the man it’s named for.

Loren D. Towle graduated from Newport High School—the building is now Harry V. Spanos District Court—in 1892. He grew up and went to grade school in Kelleyville. He had a rugged physique and possessed a farm boy’s sturdy ambition for hard work. He had done a term of post-high school education at Eastman Business College in Poughkeepsie, New York.



*Loren D. Towle*

## As I Recall: 1923 Towle School *(Continued)*

In late 1893, he moved to Boston and got a job paying \$3.50 a week. Two years later, he was a bookkeeper in a real estate office. Soon he became a real estate dealer and builder of downtown Boston office buildings. Before he was 30, he had earned more than \$30 million.

In 1918, he commenced the erection of what he considered an ideal residence in Newton, MA. The building "The building consumed the efforts of about 100 men. "The finest residence in New England," one newspaper described it.

His love and interest for his hometown did not diminish as his financial success advanced. He was elected president of the Newport Alumni Association in 1895. He printed an alumni directory and entertained the entire body at an alumni banquet.

In 1918, he bought the property that Towle school sits on and paid for all the necessary site work. Including moving a set of buildings down Belknap Avenue (total cost: \$25,000.) He then sent a letter to the Argus-Champion stating his desire, "...As I did not attend the grade schools in Newport, but did graduate from the high school, my interest is naturally in the high school...The suggestion of building a grade school had not been considered by me for a moment." part of his letter informed Newporters.

There must be something in Newport's Gilman Pond drinking water that has always caused Newporters to find a reason to argue and wrangle about every sort of town business. It is no different in the 1990's than it was in the 1920's.

The Newport School Board discussed Towle's offer of \$115,00 in a March 1921 meeting. They voted to accept the money but to build an addition onto Richards School, not erect a high school. [One of the school board members was future governor Francis P. Murphy.]

When Towle learned of the school board vote, he was angry. He wrote another letter to the newspaper and told Newport he was withdrawing his gift. "The outcome of this school house matter is the bitterest disappointment that has ever come into my life," he ended his letter.

The citizens of the Sunshine Town were in an uproar! At that 1921 school board annual meeting, more than 1,000 hostile people crammed into the Town Hall (Probably the largest meeting ever held there). They overwhelmingly voted to overturn the school board vote and proposed that a committee be sent down to Boston to meet with Loren D. Towle to tell him Newport wanted his high school.

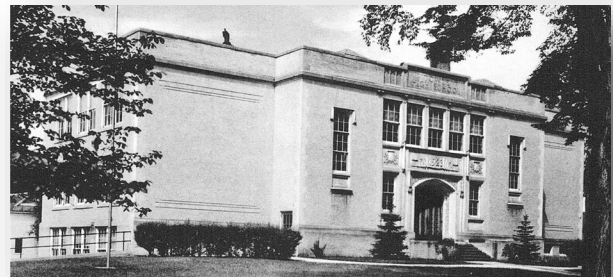
On April 26, 1921, a follow-up meeting was held. "The reading of Mr. Towle's letter, on which he recon-

sidered the withdrawal of his offer and reiterated his position to erect a high school. As the reading of the letter was completed, F.P. Rowell rushed from the hall and rang the Town Hall Bell." the Argus-Champion reported.

John McCrillis rose up and proposed that the present school board be ousted and a new one, "entirely in sympathy with Mr. Towle be appointed." A new five-member board was chosen.

The actual start of construction was delayed for two years, until 1923, because Mr. Towle was busy with projects in Boston. He wanted to be free to be personally involved in the building process. The school building was more than half completed when Loren D. Towle, age 49, died in Boston. Charles W. Keith of Nashua, the man Towle hired to be in charge of the project, packed up his tools and went home, the day he learned of Towle's death. Then Towle's gift money ran out. Mrs. Towle was not a Newporter and had no intention of giving Newport any of what was now her money.

The 1924 Newport school meeting voted to raise the necessary money to complete Towle High School. It opened in the fall of 1924, six years after Loren D. Towle bought the land.



Probable because Towle was six feet under in 1924, the town was able to name the high school's main auditorium in honor of Frank Chellis, a popular citizen who had died in 1921.

Chellis had graduated from Newport High School in 1878 and from Dartmouth in 1885. He was a lawyer who also served as principal of Newport High School for nine years. He certainly deserved to have Chellis Auditorium bear his name. Would Towle have approved of Chellis' name? Probably not. Would any Newporter have dared to ask Towle if Chellis' name could be used? Definitely not.

The class of 25 was the first to graduate from Towle High School. Today it is a grammar school, something Loren D. Towle fervently opposed having his name on.

## THE MUSEUM REPORT

By Larry Cote

Due to an attempted break-in at the Museum, the Board of Directors voted to install a security system. It is now in place and will be monitored by the Vermont Fire & Life Safety Co., the same organization that provides the security for the Town of Newport's buildings.

We have scheduled a visit by the Towle High School class of 1960 on July 30<sup>th</sup> from 3:30 until 5 PM as part of their 56<sup>th</sup> class reunion. We are excited to see old friends and make new ones.

Museum first floor displays are: a kitchen, a Winter Carnival display honoring Newport's 100<sup>th</sup> Winter Carnival, an Andre Champollion art exhibit and other Corbin/Champollion artifacts. The first floor hall is in honor of Barbara Holden Yeomans, the first floor bathroom is decorated with fashion prints from the mid 1850's and a display of current Newport Business advertisement items.

The second floor has a railroad display in the hall, a bedroom display and a technology display of typewriters, phones, radios and projectors through the years. The second floor bathroom is decorated with bottles and school group pictures. The office has a gift selection to meet all of your Newport needs.

The third floor is our Reference/Library room where we have in excess of 200 3" three-ring binders containing photographs, documents and maps on Newport from the very early days to current times. The school section is especially interesting with teacher pay slips and lessons from the 1890's, photographs, graduation announcements and yearbooks through the years.

Remember, displays will start to be changed in September so we have new or refreshed displays for October 6<sup>th</sup>, the Town's birthday. Donations of artifacts are coming in almost daily making it very exciting to be working at the Museum. Donations of Newport memorabilia or Newport related items are always encouraged and accepted. The Museum is free and handicapped accessible on the first and second floor.

We would especially love to have a candle stick telephone from the 1920's donated. Yearbooks from the 1950's and winter carnival buttons from the 1940's are also needed.



Tiny "teaser" photos of the forthcoming Newport Postcards. IN COLOR, of course!



## FROM THE TREASURER'S DESK

By Jackie Cote

The usually quieter winter months have been busier this year because of the celebration of the **100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary** of the Newport Winter Carnival. Our three new hand-painted ornaments for 2016, honor this monumental achievement. The subjects are **Queens** of past years, and includes a printed list of all queens, **King Carnival Ice Sculpture** from 1951 and **Dog Sled Racer** exiting the Corbin Covered Bridge. When purchased, each ornament is bubble wrapped and boxed for protection. The price of each is still \$12.00 and can be safely shipped at a nominal cost.

*The First 80 Years of Newport Winter Carnival*, is a new, 35 page booklet dedicated to Sharon Christie, who wrote this history as part of the 1996 Town Report. The booklet contains many interesting facts from those first carnival years and is priced at \$5.00.

We have listened to your requests for postcards. We now have a beautiful summer image of the **Corbin Covered Bridge** with its reflection in the Sugar River, and one of the **Gazebo on the Common**, taken by Bruce Kozlik. The price is only \$.25 each. Available soon are postcard images of **Skating on the Common** and **Pollards Mills Waterfalls**, by Beth Rexford, and a beautiful fall **Corbin Covered Bridge**, by Venita Nudd. Along with this group, will hopefully be two aerial images of Newport's downtown village.

Our NHS booth will again appear, weather permitting, as part of the **Newport Farmers Market** on the Common from 3pm to 6pm. The Market season begins on Friday, May 20 and runs through October 7. Please join us, along with the other wonderful merchants from Newport and the surrounding area. We will also be on the Common for the Chamber of Commerce **Chamber Day** on Saturday, June 18, from 9am to 2pm. We plan to have our photo board again, with many lovely photos of Newport's past.

Jayna Hooper (author of [Celebrating Community 1761-2011](#) written for Newport's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary) will soon complete a wonderful new book, titled *The Diary of Charles Emerson*. This book is approximately 57 pages long with many pictures. It includes Charles's diary of his trip from Newport by ship around the tip of South America to San Francisco during the gold rush years of the mid 1800's.

We currently have 233 members and are hoping to reach and exceed our 2014-2015 total of 263 members. Thank you to all for your support and membership.

## Sara Hale's "Indian Slapjacks" Forerunner to Wilson Whitehouse Cornmeal Pancakes

By Pris Hagebusch

Loren Towle, born in Newport in 1874, grew up in Newport and lived here until 1893 when he moved to Boston. Sarah J. Hale wrote "The Good Housekeeper" in 1841, which included a recipe for cornmeal pancakes called "Indian Slapjacks". Cornmeal was a new American ingredient not found in older English cookbooks. Amelia Simmons' 1796 "American Cookery" included an "Indian Slapjack" recipe very similar to our Sarah's. As Towle rose through Boston society, and built a lavish home, cornmeal was again in fashion, as World War I "wheatless days" supported the war effort. Edith Bolling Wilson, Woodrow Wilson's second wife, (m. 1915) loved cornmeal. "Cornmeal Pancakes" were a company breakfast in the Wilson White House, thru the end of the Wilson presidency in 1921.

It is, therefore, quite probable that Loren Towle enjoyed cornmeal pancakes, such as these. Since Toll House cookies are so well-known today, we decided to rename Mrs. Wilsons White House cornmeal pancakes to "Towle House Pancakes"! (This recipe, very similar to Sarah's, is from the 1968 "The Presidential Cookbook" by Poppy Cannon and Patricia Brooks.)

### "Towle House Pancakes"

1 C. white or yellow cornmeal

1 tsp salt

1 TB sugar or syrup

*Make a well in this and pour in*

1C. boiling water.

*Stir round and round and allow to stand 10 minutes.*

*Beat these next three together, then add to the cornmeal:*

1 egg

½ C. milk

2 TB melted butter or oil

*Add: ½ C. all-purpose flour and 2 tsp baking powder*

*Stir these in with a few quick strokes.*

*Cook on a hot greased griddle (380 degrees) or frying pan, turning only once.*

Serve with butter and syrup (maple of course) or molasses.

Good for breakfast (with bacon or ham) or luncheon, with some chicken or turkey hash, as the Wilson's served it.

If your kids want to add chocolate chips, you'd have Toll House-Towle House pancakes!



Towle's house in Newton, MA

The *Mill Town Messenger* is published quarterly by the Newport Historical Society

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Museum phone number 603-863-1294

Call the Museum number above for appointments to tour the Museum at alternative times

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**NHS Board Members:** Cathryn Baird, Pres.; Jerry Hagebusch, V. Pres.; Larry Cote, Museum Director; Jackie Cote, Treas.; Jayna Huot Hooper, Secretary; Dick Gassett, Priscilla Hagebusch, Virginia Irwin, Rita James, Laura McCrillis Kessler, Dean Stetson, Ann St. Martin Stout.

### Newport Historical Society Membership Form:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ New Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address/City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Personal Membership Type: \_\_\_ Individual (\$15) \_\_\_ Family (\$25) \_\_\_ Junior (\$1)

Corporate/Business: \_\_\_ Bronze(\$25) \_\_\_ Silver (\$50) \_\_\_ Gold (\$75) \_\_\_ Platinum(\$100) \_\_\_ Diamond(\$100+)

Here's my additional donation to the: Museum \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Operating \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Buildings \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Payment Method: \_\_\_ Cash \_\_\_ Check (Newport Historical Society) Total Enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail to:

**Newport Historical Society, PO Box 413, Newport, NH 03773**