

NEWPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MILL TOWN MESSENGER

Volume 17 Issue 2

April 2023

THE PRESIDENT'S PEN BY ARTHUR WALSH

This issue highlights two prominent Newport businessmen and the mansions they built in the late 1890s. The story is striking, not only because it tells the origin of these two magnificent buildings, but it also gives insight into the lives of these people and how they achieved their prominence. One of these men, Colonel Seth M. Richards, was born into a Newport family which had achieved wealth through three generations of business people, beginning with a tavern keeper who moved here from Massachusetts around 1800. The other man, Charles M. Emerson, was truly "self-made". Beginning as a clerk in a store, by the age of 52 years old his business acumen had placed him in the top few of Newport's prominent and wealthy.

This history leads one to think of modern examples. Newport still has such families, business people who achieved great success starting from little, often in a single generation. It is our great fortune as a community that these families have chosen to quietly and typically anonymously support causes which have brought opportunities, growth, and better lives to the people of Newport. No magnificent mansions mark their success- instead, they have enriched our community with the benefits of their achievements.

NHS Meeting Times

Board Meetings:
(Open to all members)

May 8

June 12

July 10

7:00 PM, Museum

First Program!

LiDAR Mapping

May 18, 6:30-7:45 PM

Museum Hours;

Sun. 10AM-2PM

Richards Library

ballroom

NEWPORT MANSIONS, AND THE MEN WHO BUILT THEM by Jackie Cote

The Man – Charles M. Emerson

Born in Newport in 1846 the son of Jonathan and Polly Emerson, Charles Emerson was a self-made man. He was at New London Academy in 1865 through 1866.

He was employed as a clerk in the Gilman Whipple store in Lebanon

where he remained for seven years before moving to Newport and going into business for himself. Charles owned and operated Peerless Manufacturing, a Newport company that made muslin women's undergarments and the Emerson Dry Goods Company,

housed downtown in the Emerson Block where he lived before building the Gables as his private residence.

His Peerless Manufacturing Company had other locations in Barton, Vermont and Greenfield, Massachusetts. He was also President of Citizens National Bank. At the time he was known as one of the most influential people of Newport.



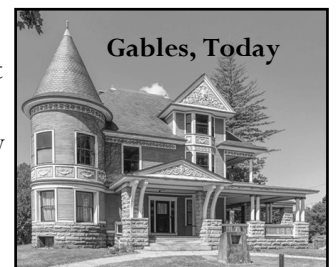
His Mansion - The Gables

The house was designed by Wilson and Webber, a Boston architectural firm that also designed Richards School. Hira Ransom Beckwith of Claremont was the builder also constructing the original Richards Library and Newport Town Hall. In addition he provided plans for and built the Seth Richards Mansion.

Eugene W Dodge of Croydon was a carpenter employed in building the Gables. Unlike the Seth Richards Mansion, which took 3 years to complete, construction of the Gables began in 1898. Charles and his wife, Louella, moved in on August 1, 1899.

The Gables has three floors, a full basement and a small attic. It has 29 rooms including nine bedrooms, three covered porches, an elaborate staircase with a stained-glass window, frescoed walls and ceilings, a dumbwaiter and speaking tubes. There was a bowling alley under the carriage house at some point in the 1930s.

On April 15, 1873, he married Luella E. Fletcher, daughter of Quartus Fletcher of Cornish NH. They had one daughter, Helen who married Harry Wilde Kendell on January 19, 1909. The wedding was the highlight of the winter social season. (Continued on Page 2.



NEWPORT MANSIONS (Cont.)

The ceremony was performed in the parlor that was decorated with an arch of green, pink and white carnations. There were both men and lady ushers.

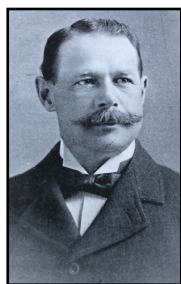
Emerson died suddenly in 1909 at age 63, two weeks after his daughter's wedding. His widow, Luella continued to live in the house sharing it with daughter Helen and her husband Harry Kendall. Six years later on Christmas 1915 Luella married Austin Elwin Stockwell, who owned a real



estate and insurance business. Stockwell died in 1924 and Luella in 1933. Helen and Harry Kendall inherited the Gables and moved in.

In 1944 the property was sold to the Newport Moose Lodge 1236. In 1946 an 85 x 38 foot auditorium was added in the back, a utilitarian addition that connected the kitchen with the separate carriage house. For many years it was rented for special occasions.

On July 31, 1991, PC Connection purchased the property with an eye to using it as a PCTV broadcast facility producing educational video tapes. The property is currently owned by a PC Connection real estate holding company.



THE MAN Colonel Seth M. Richards

Son of Dexter Richards, Col. Seth M Richards was born in Newport on June 6, 1830. He was educated in public schools, Kimball Union Academy and Phillips Andover Academy. In 1871 he joined his father at the age of twenty-one at the Sugar River Mills on Sunapee Street and the following year became Partner under the name of Dexter Richards & Son. He learned every aspect of the business to which his life was mainly devoted.

When considering all of the fluctuations and depressions that had so seriously affected the woolen manufacturing industry, the Richards Mill never ceased operations except for repairs or enlargement of the mill. The principal product manufactured was known world-wide as D R P flannel. This trade-mark was the abbreviation of **D**exter **R**ichards,

Proprietor. The normal capacity of the mill was 3,500 yards per day marketed in Boston, New York and Philadelphia employing between 80 to 100 workers. One of the long-time department managers, Patrick Herrick, was in charge of the Dyeing and Finishing Department having been employed for 47 years. Many others were also long-time employees for thirty years or more. All were made to feel that their general welfare was an important factor in the success of the business.

His major services to the community included President of First National Bank, Trustee of the Newport Savings Bank, President of the Newport Electric Light and Newport Improvement Companies.

He was also a Director of the Northern and Connecticut



River Railroads and the New Hampshire Fire Insurance Company. He served on the Executive Council of Governor Bachelder. His military title of Colonel comes from service as an aide to Governor Charles Sawyer. Col. Richards served as Newport Treasurer, was a Representative from Newport in the legislature of 1885-1886 and Senator from District No. 7 in 1897-1898 holding important committee positions exercising strong influence on matters of practical and important legislation in each term of service. He was a Republican Presidential Elector in 1900 and a delegate to the Republican National Convention in 1908. On October 9, 1878 he married Lizzie M Farnsworth. They had three daughters, Edith, Louise and Margaret. Upon his death on September 26, 1910 at the age of 60, all businesses in town were closed during the afternoon of his funeral.

HIS MANSION

Being a prosperous business man, in 1898 he began construction of a grand mansion on the west side of the common on the site of the old Edmund Burke mansion. In 1897, the Burke homestead was moved to its present location at 46 Belknap Avenue to make way for the Richards mansion. It was the largest and most elegant home fronting Newport's Common.



It was designed by a well-known Boston architect, James T. Kelley and the contractor was J. E. Warren of Marlboro, Massachusetts. The Mansion took three years to build. It was of Colonial Revival style with a truncated hip roof covered in dark gray rectangular slate. It had parapet entablature with fourteen dormers of mixed designs that included Palladian and rectangular windows. (Cont. on the bottom of pg. 4)

Special Interest Groups for the Newport Historical Society by Pris Hagebusch

One of the difficulties in an organization, especially in a small town, is having more ideas than the group has people to carry them out! Newport Historical Society (NHS) has 215 members who support it's work financially. (Thank you all very much!) Our Board has eleven members, who, so far, have carried out all of our activities. We do a lot, but know our limits in time and energy.

Everyone is busy today, with jobs, children, families, and their own favorite activities. Who wants to sit through monthly meetings of little interest to them? But, there are people who like to pursue hobbies, or have special interests, or activities they DO make time for. AND, the Historical Society often has materials or skills pertinent to your special interests. How can one connect with and utilize such resources without having to become involved in a lot of meetings and activities one is definitely NOT interested in? How would you find others interested in the same things you are?

NHS is offering to connect people thru "Special Interest Groups", very loosely connected to NHS, in that members would only participate in their own special interest activity group. AND, not be required to come to NHS meetings (unless you WANTED to of course!) but only meet with the others connected through your special interest, when and how your group decides.

NHS would help connect people with special interests, provide info on what NHS has available, like information, people, or "stuff".

POTENTIAL GROUPS WE IMAGINED (What can you dream up?)

1. **Metal Detecting** - NHS can help with sites. Share and display finds.
2. **Cemeteries** - Care and cleanup, Halloween activities a la Claremont's group? Following stone carvers' history.
3. **Airport** - History, activities, info for incoming pilots, kids activities.
4. **Waterways** - Exploration, cleanup, history, AND fishing! Historic fishing events?
5. **Conservation** - Walks, tree planting, or thinning.
6. **Sports** - History of old baseball teams in the area, or other past sporting events.
7. **Kids activities** - Tours, kids in town history, books and games.
8. **Archivist work** - Hey, do you like to read old stuff, and research topics. Have we got the STUFF for you! Maybe a group of 1, or 2, or 6? (Ha ha!)
9. **Real Estate** (?) who owned the old houses in and around town? Everyone is always asking us!
10. **Magical Mystery Tours** needs helpers.

More? Any rules?

- * Members should be NHS members (at min, \$15!)
 - * Offer informal reports of activities for the NHS Newsletter (if desired) Gives you publicity.
 - * Abide by local laws and NHS guidelines (not much)
- Leave your name, number, and interest at **603-863-1294** and we'll track interested people till you can form a group and meet as your group chooses.

The Mill Town Messenger is published quarterly
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NHS Board: Arthur Walsh, Pres., Jackie Cote, VP and Treas., Pam LaFountain, Sec., Larry Cote, Museum Director, Pris Hagebusch, Newsletter Editor, April Anderson, Jerry Hagebusch, Arnie Hebert, Laura McCrillis Kessler, Donna Menard, Stan Sweeney.

Newport Historical Society Membership Form:

Date: _____ New Membership _____ Renewal _____

Your annual membership earns you a new or continued, subscription to this newsletter!

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 \$ _____ Building \$ _____

Life Membership (\$250 - each person) _____ (Never have to renew again!)

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

Please mail to:

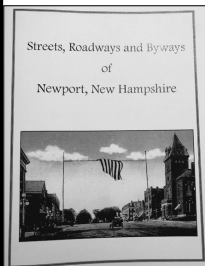
Newport Historical Society, PO Box 413, Newport, NH 03773

TREASURER'S REPORT

By Jackie Cote

As part of my Treasurer's Report in the January newsletter, I mentioned our *Mansions and Prominent Landmarks of Newport NH* book and for fun, asked if anyone could identify the building on the front. **Answer:** It was the McCrillis & Eldredge Insurance building (now vacant and for sale on the corner of Depot Street.) It may not seem possible but if you look at the window placement on the second floor, you will see the connection.

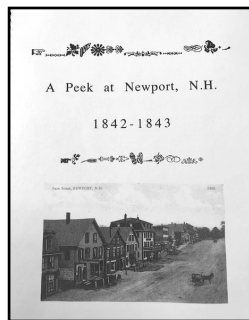
I want to identify two more books offered by Newport Historical Society (NHS). In future newsletters, I will cover all of our book offerings, a few at a time.



Our first book pictured here is titled *Streets, Roadways and Byways of Newport, New Hampshire*. It has many, many photos of the way our streets and roads looked a long time ago. It is still available at the Museum or by mail at the bargain price of \$8.00. If you don't have it, it's a must have for your Newport information collection.

The next book is *A Peek at Newport, NH – 1842-1843*. It is a diary of that period of time written by Joseph W. Parmelee of Newport. In a letter to Andy Andrews, member of the Newport Historical Society dated July 1994, Dr James Garvin, Architectural Historian with the NH Division of Historical Resources states, "Parmelee paints a picture of street life as he saw it from his shop or from the Eagle Hotel [current Salt hill Pub], local characters (including the nicknames by which they were known behind their backs), speech patterns, slang, diet, medicine, pastimes, current events, and just about every other aspect of daily life in Newport." An interesting read and at times hilarious. Price of this book is \$15.00.

Thank you to all of our members for your continued support. I hope that you have enjoyed the content of this issue of our April Mill Town Messenger!



MUSEUM REPORT

By Larry Cote

We have three pictures (from postcards) that we cannot identify. Can you help?



This old farm and barn complex may jog some-one's memory. It looks like it never was painted but well-kept. The barn closest to the house appears to be an English Barn with a sliding door, *Note: an English Barn has the door on the side of the barn, a Yankee Barn has the door on the end of the Barn*. The building to the far right has a chimney, it could be the home for the farm help or it could be a sugar house.



This farm house (left) on a country lane with it's distinctive barn needs an identification, too. The card was mailed from Newport in

1910. It is an English Barn but the gabled section over the barn doors would keep snow away from in front of the door of the barn.

This photo (to the right) could be a House in or near town, note the sidewalk. The English Barn may or may not still be there.



The Newport Historical Society Museum is located at 20 Central Street and is open every Sunday year-round, from 10 AM until 2 PM except for holiday weekends. Or call 1-603-863-1294 to make an appointment for a special viewing. Thank you.

Colonel Seth M. Richards & His Mansion (Cont.)

(Cont. from Page 3)

Porticos and pilasters were built on all four corners of the building. The interior was extravagant and rich in detail. Incorporated in the design were six oval rooms with a ballroom occupying the entire third floor.

In 1962, Mrs. Sidney Rollins, daughter of Col. Seth Richards, who was living there, donated the home to the town of Newport to be used as a Library. She remembered her father often saying, regarding the extravagance of the structure, that, "perhaps he should buy a parrot for the front entrance to remind him... 'you fool, you... you fool, you'". When asked why she donated it, she remarked, "I couldn't think of anything nicer to give, and it is something of which my husband would have approved."