

MILL TOWN MESSENGER

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April 2025

BEAUTIFUL NEEDLEWORK EXHIBIT NOW DISPLAYED AT NHS MUSEUM!
BY PAM LAFOUNTAIN

The “Bedroom” of the Newport Historical Society Museum has gotten an historical makeover! Beautiful pieces of the handiwork of Mrs. Helen Dorr, wife of mill owner George Dorr Sr., now grace the walls. The exquisite works of needlepoint and crewel embroidery are gifts from Mrs. Dorr’s daughter, Priscilla Dorr Swayze. This beautiful collection was delivered back home to Newport, at the Newport Historical Society, by Mrs. Dorr’s granddaughter, Anne Markle and her husband, Cappy.



NHS President, Dean Stetson, accepts, as Anne and Cappy Markle deliver Helen Dorr’s handiwork to the museum.

This newly installed exhibit includes a biography of Mrs. Dorr, explanations of her needlework stitches and techniques, and other examples of handwork projects found at the Dorr Mill Store in Guild, NH.

A chair, upholstered with a needle-pointed cover also done by Mrs. Dorr, a recent donation by Helen’s grandson, Terry Dorr, will also be part of the exhibit. The exhibit of these beautiful handwork pieces and the woman who created them, are now open for viewing at the NHS Museum.



These pictures do not do justice to the incredible art work in these hand-embroidered pieces. To get the best view of the colors and precise stitching on this handwork, visit the Dorr Exhibit, beginning in May at the Newport Historical Society Museum.



NHS Times

**Business Meetings:
Open to the Public
May 12, 6:30 PM**

At the Ruger Room of the LaValley Family Community Center on Meadow Road

June 9, 6 PM

Location to be announced—see website.

July 7, 6 PM

Location to be announced—see website.

Museum Open Hours

10AM—2PM Sundays,
and by appointment

Upcoming Programs

These are our usual programs on various historic people, places and things from Newport.

Summercrest Programs: Held at **Summercrest Senior Living Center**, at 2 PM. Lovely refreshments will be provided by the house chef. Contact 603-863-8181 ext. 309 or dway@summercrest.net for reservations.

May 15: "Newport Welcomes a Hero - The Story of General Lafayette's Trip Through Newport in 1825"

Historical Society Programs: Held at the **Richards Library Ballroom**, 6 PM to 8PM. Refreshments served and no reservations required.

May 21: **Francis P. Murphy—From Shoeless Boy to Governor of New Hampshire.**

June 11: "Newport Welcomes a Hero - The Story of General Lafayette's Trip Through Newport in 1825"

Newport Historical Society Board Members for 2025:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| President: Dean Stetson | Vice President: Mike Loftus | Secretary: Pam LaFountain |
| Treasurer: Paula Johnson | Museum Director: Arnie Hebert | Newsletter Editor: Pris Hagebusch |
| Website Mgrs: Mike Loftus, Tom Nulty | Facebook Mgrs. Mike Loftus and April Anderson | |
| Additional Board Members: Ann St.Martin Stout, Donna Menard, Laura McCrillis Kessler | | |

WOULDN'T MR. ROWELL BE PROUD!

By Pam LaFountain

On March 27, 2025, LaValley Family Community Center on Meadow Road officially opened. (See the article on page 4 for the history of the former "Recreation Center")

So, what about the history of the field where the new Recreation Center now sits? That history is not quite so old, but the story should be told, because it is a story of the generosity of Newporters in years gone by.

Many Newporters remember that a sign (see the photo) stating "**Rowell - Caplan Field 1961** used to sit in the outfield of what was more commonly known as "the **Little League Field.**" Here is the story:

The land where the new recreation center is now located was originally a pasture for horses belonging to the Richards family. At some point, the land was sold to Jesse Rowell, son of Franklin Pierce Rowell. The elder Rowell had donated land across the street to the town of Newport for its first playground. Jesse sold the two buildings located on the property, the barn and stables for the horses, to Abe Caplan who used them to store "shoddy" wool from the Brampton Mill. (Shoddy wool was recycled wool that could be used in producing more wool fibers.)

Step back a few years: In 1957, Newport began a Little League program. The teams used the playground, across the street, where there was a baseball diamond. Unfortunately the town teams, like the high school, and other organizations, had priority over the field and whenever one of those teams had a home game, the Little League had to cancel its games. The Little Leaguers needed its own field.

Around the same time, there was interest in Newport to build and open a public pool. Jesse Rowell, following in his father's footsteps, donated the former pasture land to the town, for the pool which would benefit the children of Newport. However, interest waned and not enough money could be raised to conduct the pool project. An opportunity opened for the Little League and Mr. Rowell agreed that if a pool could not be built, then a baseball field could fulfill his desire to support the children of Newport as his father had done. But, the baseball diamond would have to be bigger than the pasture land that Mr. Rowell had donated. So Homer Aldrich of the Little League organization approached Abe Caplan to see if they could work out something to get his land where the barn and stable were located.

It seems that Mr. Caplan had already entered into an agree-



ment to sell the land to another buyer for \$1,000; the deed was already drawn up. However, the \$1,000 had not yet been received by Mr. Caplan. Right then and there, after hearing the story of the dilemma of the young Little Leaguers, Caplan ripped up the deed and gave his piece of land to the Little League Organization.

As they so often do, both then and now, the community rallied behind this new project. A lot of work needed to be done, as the field was three feet below the level of the street, and would need to be leveled and grassed. A discovery helped with the financial aspect of the project. **Josh Young**, manager of the Gordon Mill, when he died, had set up a trust fund to be used to benefit the children of Newport. The Little League received \$600!

The Newport fire department supervised the burning down of the two buildings. Once the buildings were down a bulldozer, donated by George **Catsam**, used the rubble to begin filling in the future field. Gravel from the bank near the railroad was added on top of the rubble. No additional fill was needed especially considering the many volunteers with their rakes and shovels who joined in to help. The **Rotary Club** seeded and fertilized the field.

Then, in the spring of 1961, in their fifth year since the league began, the Newport Little Leaguers took the field, their own field! On August 23, 1961, the Little League Board of Directors voted to name the field "Rowell - Caplan Field." (Hence the sign!)

This "labor of love" has been enjoyed by so many families of Newport! I think

I can safely say that Franklin Rowell, Jesse Rowell, Abe Caplan and Josh Young, would be delighted with the NEW Recreation Center, including a full Little League Ball Field, that will serve so many children and their families over the next generations.

Now the LaValley family and the many others who aided in the development of our NEW Recreation Center, will join those in the past who wanted the children of Newport to have a place to safely play and grow. Don't you agree, all will be smiling as someone again announces, "Play Ball!"



Abe Caplan & Jesse Rowell throw out the first pitch at the dedication of the Little League Field in 1961.

NEWPORT WELCOMES A REVOLUTIONARY WAR HERO - 1825 - 2025

By Pam LaFountain

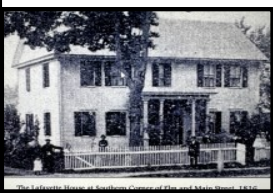
In 1824, President James Monroe invited the only living general of the American Revolution to tour the states, as a guest of the country celebrating the 50th anniversary of the birth of the US. That general was Marquis de Lafayette! During his 13 month tour through 24 states, covering about 6,000 miles, Lafayette, now in his 60s, “took the country by storm” attending parades, dinners and balls in his honor. He was the topic of every conversation and it was said that, “*women forget their lovers to dream of him.*”

At the age of 19, Lafayette had left his native France, against the wishes of the French King and Lafayette’s family. He provided his own transportation across the Atlantic and was commissioned into the US military despite the fact that he had little military experience. He became “like a son” to General George Washington, who was impressed by the young man’s leadership and bravery.

Lafayette was wounded early in his tenure, but continued to engage in battles and was instrumental in sealing the alliance between the US colonies and France, which led to America’s victory in the war.

On returning to France after the American war, Lafayette became involved in the French Revolution and at times feared for his life. He found himself caught between his aristocratic background and his desire to see his native country share in the freedoms he had fought for Americans to achieve.

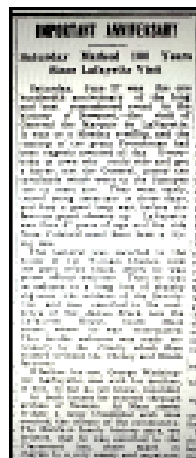
What you might not know is that very same General Lafayette visited Newport on that eventful *Farewell Tour of 1824-25*. On the early evening of June 27th Lafayette visited two homes in Newport and met many American Revolutionary veterans, before moving on to Claremont for the night.



The home of James Breck



Home of Col. William Cheney



Newspaper Account of 100th anniversary of Lafayette's Visit NH Argus and Spectator - July 3, 1925 (No, you probably cannot read it here!)



LaFayette’s Tour sign on Newport Common

The DAR Lafayette Committee is planning events in Newport to celebrate the 200th anniversary of this visit.

On June 27, 2025, between 3:00 - 4:30 pm, a horse drawn coach will encircle the Town Common and if you are lucky you will see Lafayette (not the real one, he died in 1834,) but a skilled character actor who will emerge, be greeted by local officials, say a few words to the crowd and depart on his way to Claremont, just

like Lafayette did 200 years ago. This is an event you won’t want to miss. Perhaps you will be able to snap a photo or even shake his hand and say, “*I saw America’s last Revolutionary War general!*”

The Newport Historical Society and the Library Arts Center are teaming up to prepare area residents for the historic visit. The Newport Historical Society will be doing a presentation called “*Newport Welcomes a Hero—The Story of General Lafayette’s Trip Through Newport 1825,*” The first will be at 2:00 pm on May 15, at Summercrest Senior Living Community, and the second, at 6:00 pm on June 11, in the Richards Free Library. The presentation is free of charge at both locations.

On Saturday, May 31, from 10:00 am - 2:00 pm the Library Arts Center will be doing a “make and take” of two types of cockades (two different skill levels) and Lafayette French beaded bracelets. For photos and details, check out this free of charge event at the LAC website at <https://libraryartscenter.org/>

Please attend the NHS presentation to learn the following information:

1. Why did Lafayette choose to come to the aid of the American colonists?
2. Why did this hero spend time in a French jail?
3. Why did President Monroe invite Lafayette back to the United States?
4. What were some of the memorable events on the 13 month tour?
5. How did Lafayette’s beliefs and dreams affect American culture?
6. What do we know about his visit to Newport?

Join us for any of these activities and be ready for the “official visit” on June 27th in downtown Newport.

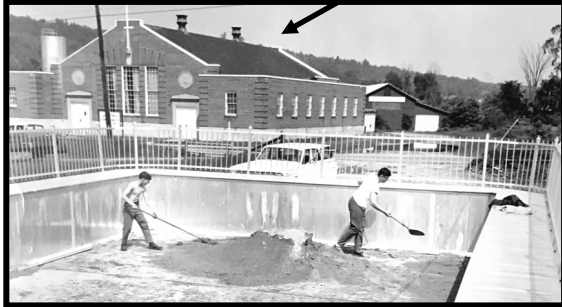
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90 Year History of Newport's National Guard Armory/Recreational Center

By Donna Menard

For almost 100 years, the National Guard Armory, on Belknap Avenue, has served the town of Newport, NH!



In 1935, funds were appropriated for the WPA to build the Armory. The floor plan had one big area for drills, and two wings, one for officer's quarters and one for supplies. The Armory was the home of the National Guard Unit 197th CA (Coastal Artillery) (A.A.) 2nd Battalion Company M. In 1937, Governor Murphy and his council were invited to the building's dedication, followed by a Ball. Throughout the early forties, drills were held every week (Thursdays at 7 PM) and Newport's guardsmen were one of the first units called to serve in WWII.

After the War, the Armory was host to many activities:

- 1947 Bowling Team
- Area car dealerships showed their new models of the year,

(brought in through the large doors on the back of the building!)

- Recruiting Campaigns – to get up to authorized strength of 5 officers and 112 men.
- In 1966, the town of Newport started leasing the building for recreational use (at \$100 per month).
- In 1967, John Bebe bought the building and continued to lease it to the town.
- The DMV had commercial license testing there.
- In the 1960s, they had a dog training class.
- Shooting practice was held in a specially insulated basement shooting range.
- An above ground swimming pool was built across the street, *(see the photo at the left.)*

In the 70's and 80's the town provided basketball leagues, roller skating, pool tables, a weight room (for both the guys and the gals) and dances for Newporters, all at the former Armory. All these activities provided a safe place for youth to go after school (and get out of Mom's hair!)

In 1978, John Bebe donated the building to the town. Since then, they have continued with some of the previous programs and added new ones, such as exercise classes, summer camps, and renting out the facility for birthday parties.

"I, personally, say, *THANK YOU, for serving four generations of my family!*" from **Donna Menard**, a sentiment probably echoed by many other Newport families.



The Newport House at Corner of Park and Sunapee Streets, circa 1860



The Dexter Richards House circa 1900



The Sullivan County Courthouse at Court Square, 1826



The Town Hall/Sullivan County Courthouse at 20 Main Street, 1873

Membership form also available on our website:

www.newportnhhistory.org, where you can pay with PayPal, Venmo, or Credit Cards

Newport Historical Society, 2025 Membership Form:

Date: _____ New Membership _____ or Renewal _____

Name(s) _____

Address/City _____

State, Zip _____

Email _____

Telephone _____

Other phone (if desired) _____

Payment Method: ___ Cash ___ Check: "Newport Historical Society"

See note above for other methods of payment!

Total Enclosed \$ _____

Mail: Newport Historical Society, P.O. Box 413, Newport, NH 03773

Life Membership _____

(\$250 - each person)

(Never have to renew again!)

Or:

\$100 _____ per family

\$50 _____ per family

\$25 _____ per family

\$15 _____ per person

Or More! _____

Thank you for your
Contribution