

The Preservation Society of Newport County

The Preservation Society of Newport County, Rhode Island's largest cultural organization, protects, preserves and presents an exceptional collection of house museums and landscapes in one of the most historically intact cities in America. Its 11 historic properties – seven of which are National Historic Landmarks – and 88 acres of landscapes exemplify three centuries of the finest achievements in American architecture, decorative arts and landscape design, spanning the Colonial era to the Gilded Age.

In keeping with its mission, the Preservation Society strives to offer its members and the public a comprehensive view of each property's architecture, interiors, landscapes and social history. From 2016-2019, the Preservation Society hosted more than 1 million tours to its Newport Mansions properties, making it the only museum in New England outside of Boston to have more than 1 million admissions.

Visitors to the Newport Mansions can choose from audio or guided tours, behind-the-scenes tours, children's tours, garden tours and major events including the Newport Flower Show, the Newport Mansions Wine & Food Festival and Holidays at the Newport Mansions. Audio tours at several properties are provided in multiple languages in addition to English.

The Preservation Society is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, a mark of excellence in the museum community.

The Preservation Society was founded in 1945 as a private, nonprofit organization. Admission charges, membership dues, fundraising events and donations help the Preservation Society to carry out its mission of protecting Newport's heritage for present and future generations. Other sources of income include property rentals for private and corporate events, and educational sales. Its historic properties have served as backdrops for several major feature films, television shows including HBO's "The Gilded Age," advertising and photography shoots.

The Preservation Society's central office is located at 424 Bellevue Avenue, Newport. For more information, call (401) 847-1000 or visit www.NewportMansions.org.

Timeline

- 1945 The Preservation Society is founded by Mr. and Mrs. George Henry Warren and 11 other dedicated visionaries who want to preserve Newport's architectural heritage.
- 1946 Hunter House (1748) is acquired to prevent the dismantling of its interiors.
- 1947 The Pitts Head Tavern (1726) is acquired by the Preservation Society.
- 1947 Thomas Chorley of Colonial Williamsburg delivers a speech entitled "Only Tomorrow" which charts a course for the future development of the Preservation Society.

1948 Countess Laszlo Széchenyi opens The Breakers to the public to raise funds for the Preservation Society.

Harvard University archaeologists, under contract to the Preservation Society, begin excavating the site of the Old Stone Mill. The dig is inconclusive as to the origin of the structure.

Antoinette Downing and Vincent J. Scully Jr. launch the first comprehensive survey of Newport's architecture, sponsored by Mrs. Michael M. van Beuren, later published in 1952 as "The Architectural Heritage of Newport, RI, 1640-1915."

1953 Rescued by Alice Brayton, the Colonial cemetery on Pelham Street, final resting place of Governor Benedict Arnold and his family, is presented to the Preservation Society.

1954 The historic White Horse Tavern (1673) is acquired and restoration begun.

1959 John Rovensky donates a park on Bellevue Avenue which is maintained by the Preservation Society.

1962 The Elms (1901) is purchased to protect it from demolition.

1963 The Preservation Society leads a successful effort to urge the City Council to adopt a historic zoning ordinance.

Marble House (1892) is purchased with funds provided by Mr. & Mrs. Harold S. Vanderbilt.

1969 Chateau-sur-Mer (1852) is purchased to save it from an unknown fate.

1971 Mr. and Mrs. J. Edgar Monroe donate Rosecliff (1902).

1972 The Breakers (1895) is purchased from Vanderbilt family descendants.

Mrs. Anthony B. Rives bequeaths Kingscote (1841).

1973 Alice Brayton bequeaths Green Animals Topiary Garden (c.1860).

Paramount Pictures films "The Great Gatsby" at Rosecliff and other Preservation Society houses.

1974 Preservation Society estate grounds receive part of the heroic-scale outdoor sculpture exhibition "Monumenta," of which the only remainder is the Sod Maze at Chateau-sur-Mer.

1976 The National Trust for Historic Preservation presents to Katherine U. Warren, posthumously, and to the Society, its prestigious Louise duPont Crowninshield Award for "superlative achievement in the preservation and interpretation of sites, buildings, and objects significant in American history and culture."

- 1977 The Chinese Tea House at Marble House is moved from its precarious perch atop the eroding Cliff Walk, in preparation for its later restoration.
- 1986 Aletta Morris McBean bequeaths Chepstow (1860) and all of its collections.
- 1991 The former summer home of the Osgood and Pell families, 424 Bellevue Avenue (1888), is purchased as the Society's new headquarters.
- 1992 The first annual Newport Symposium brings together internationally noted speakers, scholars and collectors.
- 1994 The McKim, Mead and White-designed Isaac Bell House (1883) is purchased with the support of Mr. & Mrs. A.L. Ballard.
- 1995 The Breakers is designated a National Historic Landmark.
- 1996 The Elms and Kingscote are designated National Historic Landmarks.
- 1997 Isaac Bell House is designated a National Historic Landmark.
- 2001 Restoration of the French Classical Sunken Garden at The Elms is completed.
- The first major restoration of The Breakers includes replacement of the roof and complete exterior cleaning.
- 2003 All Preservation Society properties are designated Official Projects of the Save America's Treasures program, sponsored by the White House Millennium Council and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
- 2004 The Preservation Society of Newport County is accredited by the American Association of Museums, making it one of only 750 accredited museums nationwide.
- 2015 The Newport Mansions Arboretum is officially recognized and accredited.
- 2020 The Preservation Society of Newport County closes for three months between March and June because of the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Sparkling Lights at The Breakers, an outdoor holiday light display, debuts.
- 2023 Rosecliff undergoes a \$7.4 million restoration including replacement of the roof and roof balustrade, new Ballroom flooring, exterior cleaning and repointing, and restoration of exterior iron and gilding.