



Preservation Society of Newport County to Launch “Gilded Age Newport in Color” Exhibition

Newport, Rhode Island, Feb. 15, 2024 — The Preservation Society of Newport County, in partnership with the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, will launch the exhibition "Gilded Age Newport in Color" at Rosecliff on March 15, taking visitors back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries when African heritage families were active members of a new type of urban setting – the resort community.

At Rosecliff through June 30, this exhibition will display more than 150 objects ranging from photographs, handbills, business cards and news clippings to furniture, clothing, jewelry and ceramics, from the collections of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, The Preservation Society of Newport County and other institutions.

The exhibition examines various aspects of everyday life in the African heritage community of Gilded Age Newport, including where they lived, worked, played, traveled and worshipped. The city offered a rare opportunity for persons of color from Providence, Boston, New York, Philadelphia and Washington to experience an uninhibited social exchange.

“The ‘Gilded Age Newport in Color’ exhibition explores an important chapter in American history when African heritage families could unite and promote their economic and social well-being through self-reliance, entrepreneurship, political advancement and cultural interchange,” says Theresa “Soni” Guzmán Stokes, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society. “Rhode Island’s Black Heritage Society has drawn from its over 9,000 linear feet of collections representing an African heritage experience that dramatically marks African heritage excellence. As best described by Booker T. Washington, America’s leading civil rights advocate of the Gilded Age, ‘Success always leaves footprints.’”

“We are proud to continue telling stories of the Gilded Age from different perspectives that give us a broader understanding of Newport during this important era,” says Trudy Coxe, CEO of the Preservation Society.

Newport's earliest African heritage doctors, dentists, teachers, hospitality entrepreneurs and elected officials appeared during the Gilded Age. Visitors will see how African heritage entrepreneurs leveraged their commercial enterprises to promote economic security and advance their political interests by hosting numerous African heritage social and political gatherings that ran the broad spectrum of political rallies and became the foundation for the

later 20th-century civil rights movements. Additionally, these entrepreneurs built wealth to invest in and advance civic, recreational, social and political interests for all people of color.

Visitors will be introduced to significant historical figures like Dr. Marcus F. Wheatland, the first known African heritage physician to live and practice in Newport and a medical specialist to many of the city's summer elite; accomplished journalist Lillian Susie Fitts Jeter, who wrote for *Ladies Home Journal*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *McCall's Magazine* among other publications; soprano opera singer Abbie Mitchell; and prominent literary critic and poet William Stanley Beaumont Braithwaite.

As part of the exhibit's launch, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation is thrilled to assist with marketing the debut of the exhibit on the national stage as part of the state's plan to promote the rich and diverse history of Rhode Island.

"Newport is well known as the blissful summer retreat destination for America's wealthiest families and individuals back in the 19th and 20th centuries, but it was also home to an abundant African heritage community that played critical roles in the economic and cultural development of African heritage and the county overall," says Anika Kimble-Huntley, Rhode Island Commerce Corporation's Chief Marketing Officer. "African heritage families were not looking to integrate or emulate the white elite families of Newport; they were looking to do business with them and gain interdependence and establish their own communities. This exhibition is an important step in sharing the holistic picture of Newport's diverse history."

This exhibition is included with admission to Rosecliff. Purchase tickets in person or through www.NewportMansions.org. To learn more about "Gilded Age Newport in Color," please visit www.NewportMansions.org/events.

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About The Preservation Society of Newport County, Rhode Island

The Preservation Society of Newport County, Rhode Island, is a nonprofit organization accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. It is dedicated to preserving and interpreting the area's historic architecture, landscapes, decorative arts and social history. Its 11 historic properties – seven of them National Historic Landmarks – span more than 250 years of American architectural and social development. For more information, please visit www.NewportMansions.org.

About the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society

The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, formed in 1975, is one of America's oldest African heritage and historical organizations and a founding member of the Association of African American Museums. Constituted for the purposes of collecting, preserving, and interpreting materials relating to the history of the African Heritage people of Rhode Island and beyond. For more information, please visit <https://www.rblackheritage.org/>

About Rhode Island Commerce Corporation

Rhode Island Commerce Corporation is the official full-service, economic development

organization for the state of Rhode Island. The Corporation works with public, private, and nonprofit partners to create the conditions for businesses in all sectors to thrive as well as improve the quality of life for Rhode Island citizens. Rhode Island Commerce Corporation's tourism division works in partnership with local convention and visitors' bureaus, chambers of commerce, and private travel-related organizations to promote economic opportunity and prosperity for Rhode Island through both domestic and international tourism. In 2022, Rhode Island attracted 27.7 million visitors, and tourism spending contributed \$5.3 billion to the State's economy with a total economic impact of \$7.9 billion. Tourism subsidized 84,386 jobs, representing one in every eight jobs in the State, providing more than \$1.9 billion in government revenues as well as contributed \$903 million in state and local taxes. For more information on visiting Rhode Island including travel guides, events, images and more, go to www.VisitRhodeIsland.com.