

### III. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

#### EARLY GROWTH

Although the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood remained undeveloped during the seventeenth century, Thames and Spring streets, the major north-south arteries, are actually extensions of Newport's original street pattern. In 1639, shortly after settlement in the vicinity of the Town Spring behind the site of the Colony House, Thames Street was laid out parallel to the coast, north and south of the "Great Common" (Washington Square). Spring Street,

which originated at the Town Spring, was laid out parallel to Thames Street. By 1712, according to John Mumford's street survey of Newport, Thames Street extended to "Miles End," the early eighteenth-century name for the area near Pope Street. Spring Street extended as far south as Clifton Street (now Ann Street); Brewer Street and Young Street were the first crossroads to be laid out within the neighborhood.

Building activity in this vicinity occurred during the mid-eighteenth century following the town's growth in population and importance as a seaport.\* As harborside prop-

erty in the northern half of the port became built-up with the houses, wharf complexes and shipyards of merchants engaged in coastal and international trade, development gradually spread south of Marlborough Dock, the town's first wharf. In addition to providing merchants with dock space for their ships and land for their houses and warehouses, the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood housed

\*For an overview of Newport's eighteenth-century maritime commerce, see *The Architectural Heritage of Newport County* by Antoinette F. Downing and Vincent J. Scully, Jr.

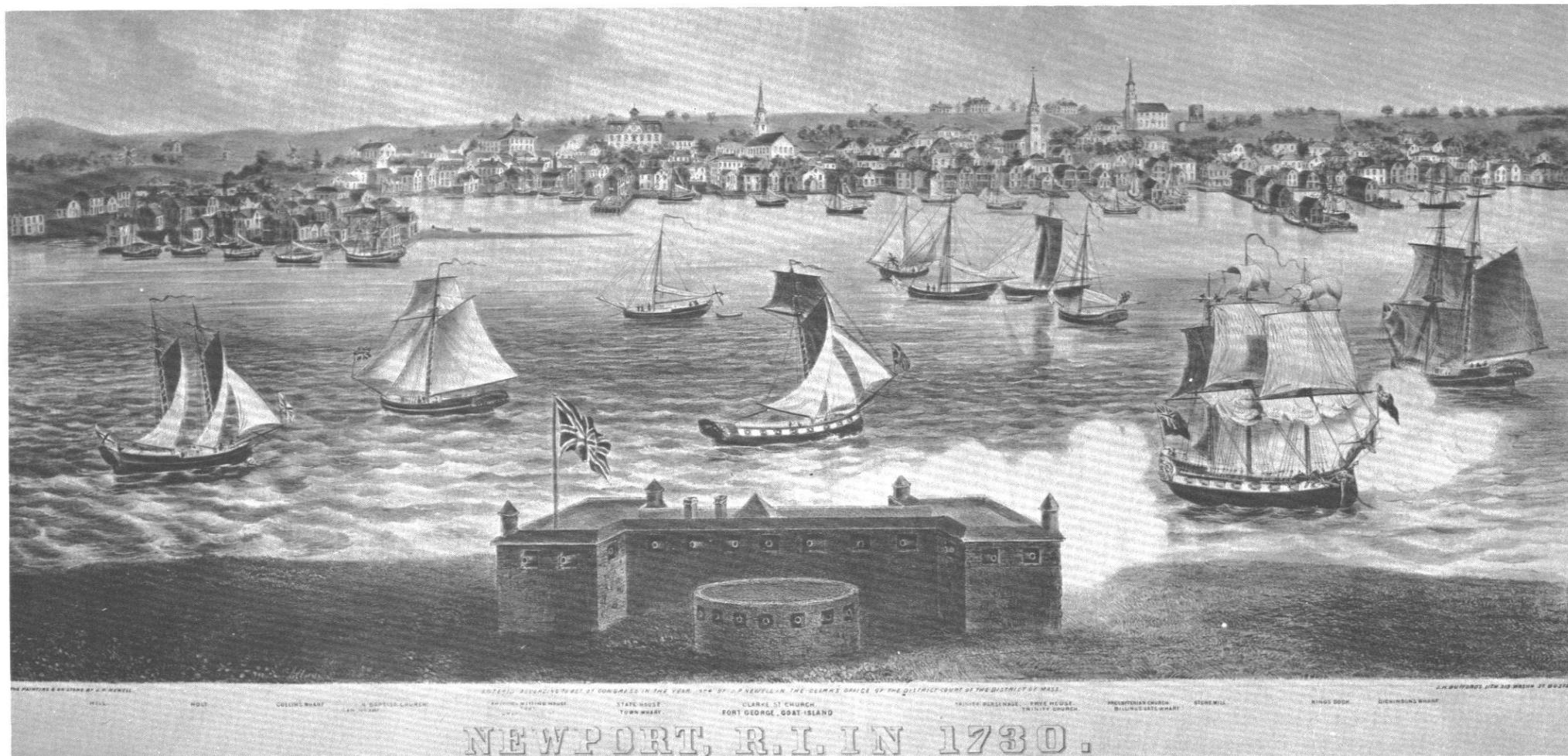


Fig. 3: View of Newport harbor in 1730; detail of J. P. Newell's 1865 lithograph.

the increasing number and variety of laborers, craftsmen and seamen who were depended upon for local manufacturing activities and maritime trade. The Reverend Ezra Stiles' 1758 map of Newport shows that five additional roads were laid out between Thames and Spring streets after Mumford's street survey of 1712. Approximately fifteen houses, seventeen shops, stills and stables and fourteen wharves had been constructed in the neighborhood. By 1777, 126 houses, stables, storage sheds and warehouses stood in the area (according to a Newport map prepared by Charles Blaskowitz), further illustrating the rapid, pre-Revolutionary development along both sides of Thames Street; on Spring, Fair, Gidley, Ann, Young, Howard and Pope streets; and along the waterfront.

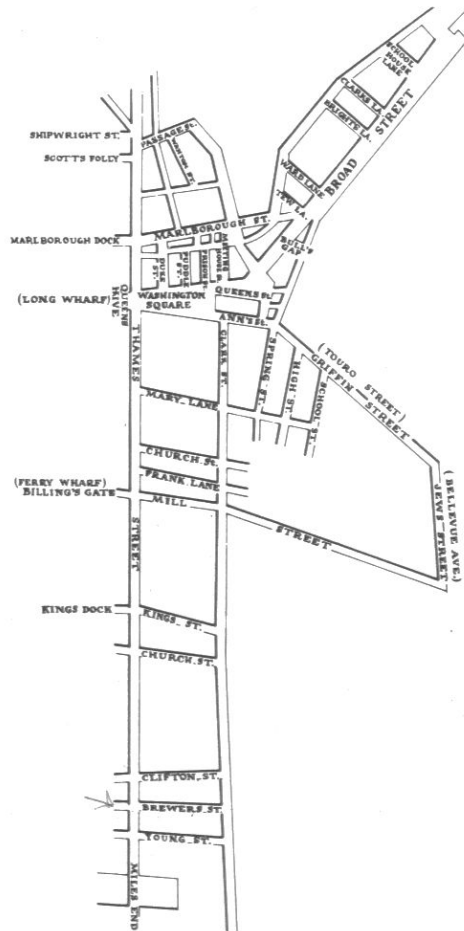


Fig. 4: John Mumford's Newport map of 1712; redrawn version.

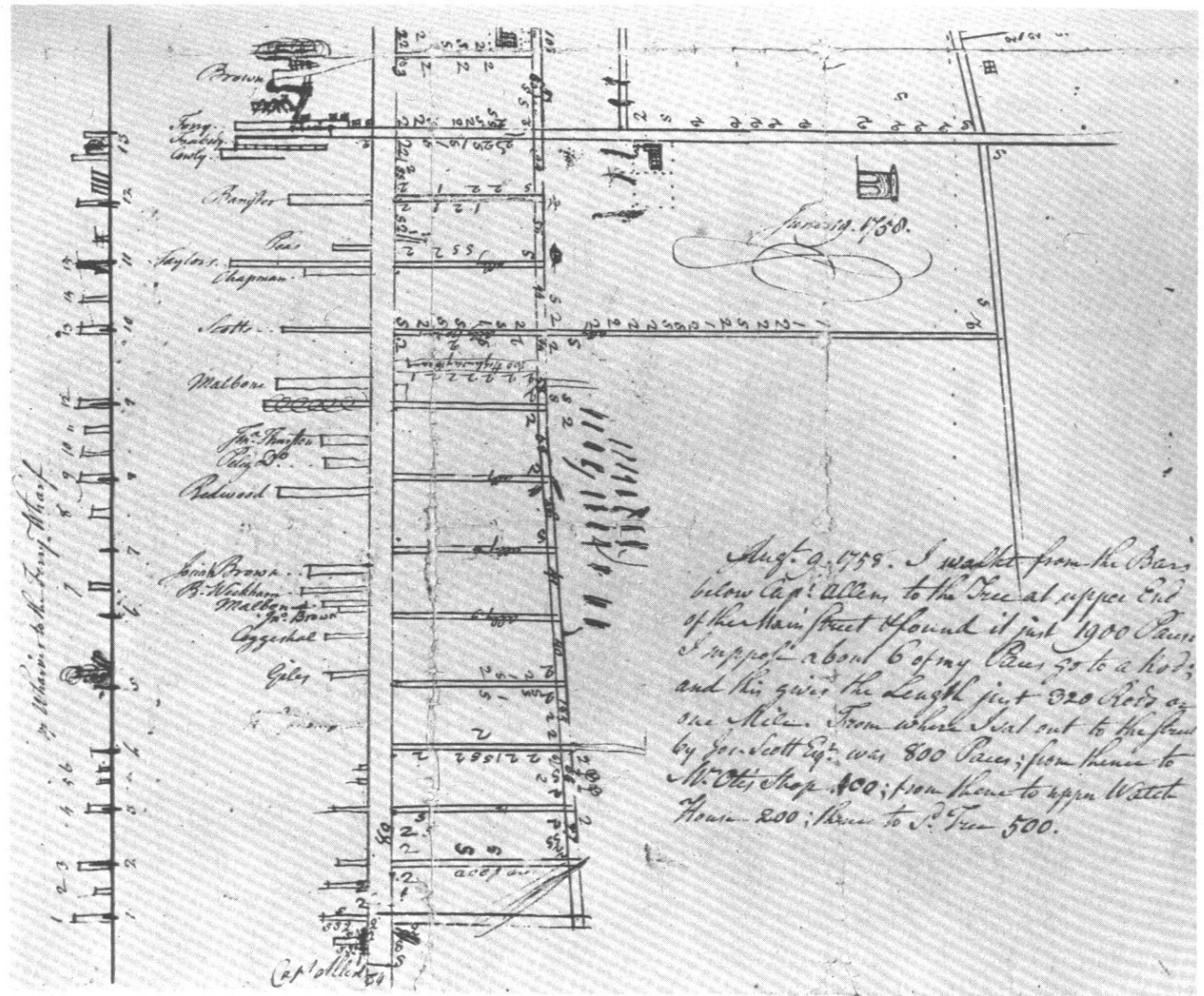


Fig. 5: Detail of Ezra Stiles' manuscript map of Newport completed in 1758.

Southern Thames Street, known as the "Court End of Town," was a favorite residential location of well-to-do merchants in the mid-eighteenth century. From their homes along Thames Street, merchant princes such as Francis Malbone could look out onto their gardens and wharves and see their warehouses, ship chandlers' and sailmakers' shops. Except for the wharves themselves, the original fabric of Southern Thames Street's waterfront has been replaced. Yet much of the neighborhood's distinctive, pre-Revolutionary domestic architecture is intact. The Francis Malbone House of about 1758, located at 392 Thames Street, is one of the most imposing residences built in Newport during this era. Designed according to plans traditionally attributed to Peter Harrison—architect of Newport's Redwood Library (1748), Touro Synagogue (1763) and Brick Market (1762)—the mansion is a dignified, three-story brick structure with a hip roof with a monitor. Malbone's house is an important reminder of Thames Street's historic mercantile activity. The mansions of Abraham Redwood and other prominent Newport merchants who also lived at the southern end of Thames Street, are, unfortunately, no longer standing.

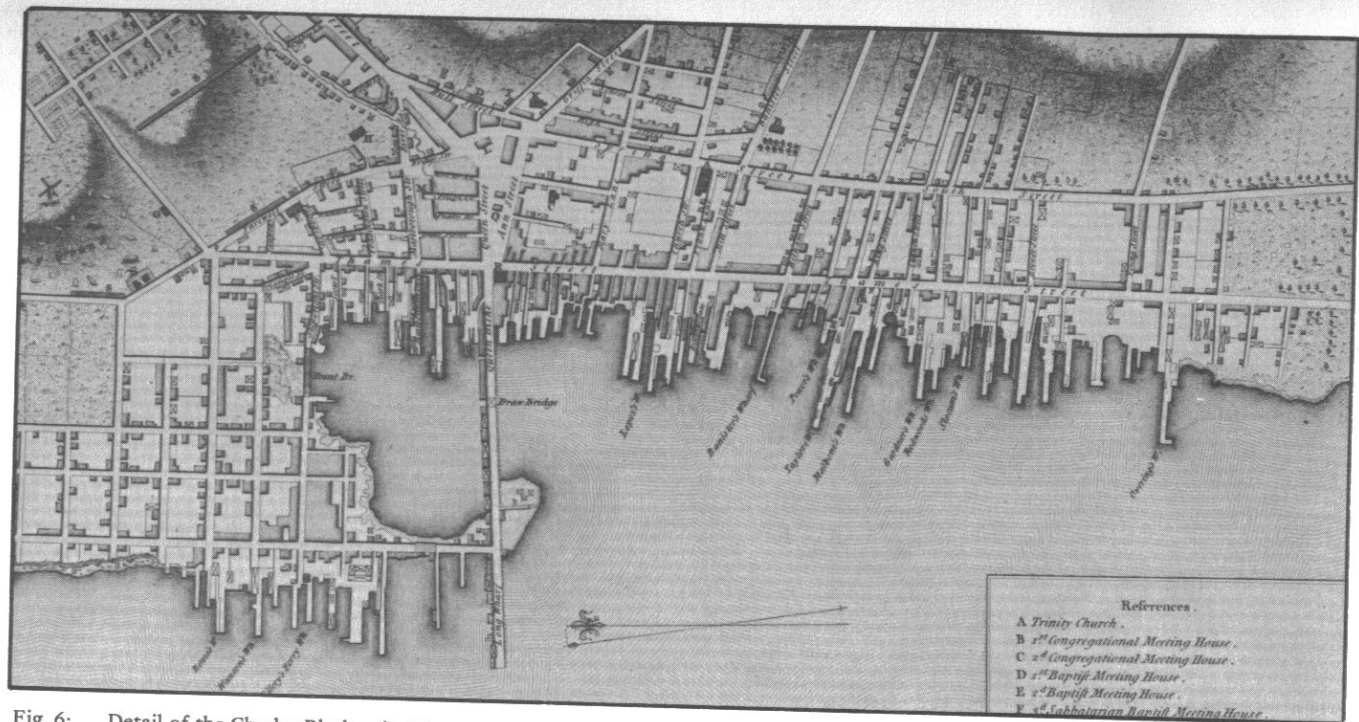


Fig. 6: Detail of the Charles Blaskowitz Newport map of 1777.



Fig. 7: Abraham Redwood gate (c. 1728), formerly on Thames Street, now at Redwood Library (Photo, Meservey).



Fig. 8: Drawing of the Abraham Redwood House (1727), formerly on Thames Street (from *Early Homes of Rhode Island*).



Fig. 9: Francis Malbone House (c. 1758), 392 Thames Street.

The Southern Thames Street Neighborhood also retains several examples of small, frame, two- or two-and-a-half-story houses topped by hip, gambrel or gable-on-hip roofs, built between 1730 and 1750. Most notable among these are the Henry Hunter House (John G. Whitehorse House), built before 1756 at 428-432 Thames Street, and the house at 18 Pope Street, built before 1777. The former which originally belonged to a local distiller, is a two-story, hip-roofed house with a pedimented entranceway; the latter is a two-and-a-half-story residence with a recessed side entrance and gambrel roof. Other mid-eighteenth-century houses in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood are: the Benjamin Mason House (c. 1740) at 25 Brewer Street, the Edward Cole House (c. 1760) at 29 Howard Street, the Sherman-Lee-Lewis House (before 1777) at 283 Spring Street, the James Carpenter House (c. 1765) at 406-410 Thames Street and the Overing House (before 1777) at 479-483 Thames Street. In addition, at least three houses of this period were moved into or within the neighborhood during the nineteenth century: these are the Hazard-King-Austin House (eighteenth century) at 28 Ann Street, the Bridget Brennan House (c. 1750) at 23 Bachelor Street and the John Sullivan House (c. 1750) at 600 Thames Street.\*

During the 1760s, anti-British sentiment among Newport merchants was aroused by strict anti-smuggling regulations and the aggressive customs patrol in Newport Harbor. Local opposition to British restrictions came to an end when Crown troops occupied Newport in 1776. Newport's maritime commerce ceased. During their stay, the British billeted in churches and public buildings and they dismantled some 480 structures for firewood. Not all Newporters opposed the British of course—the Loyalist Edward Cole, who served as recruiting officer for His Majesty's Army during the occupation, lived at 29 Howard Street in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood.

\*Detailed information on Newport's eighteenth-century domestic architecture can be found in *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island*.



Fig. 10: View of Thames Street taken in about 1880.



Fig. 11: 18 Pope Street (before 1777).



Fig. 12: Edward Cole House (c. 1760), 29 Howard Street.

In July of 1780, the British abandoned Newport, and French troops under Count Rochambeau were quartered here for several months. This change in fortunes did not reverse the port's economic decline. In the two decades preceding the Revolution, Newport had been at the height of its prosperity; it was one of the five major commercial centers of the American colonies. Following the war, Rhode Island's economic center shifted to Providence which had suffered relatively little and which, in any event, was growing faster than Newport. Newport never regained its prominence as a seaport, although a few wealthy merchants attempted to renew its maritime commerce before the turn-of-the-century.

During the early nineteenth century, Newport's ship-owners recovered a small measure of their trade. Local companies sent ships to Sweden and Russia for iron, to Java for coffee and to China for tea, silks and cottons. The slave trade resumed between 1804 and 1807, although it had been illegal in Rhode Island since 1787. The profits realized by these ventures were stopped by the Jeffersonian Embargo of 1807 which prohibited American ships from embarking for foreign ports in an effort to force withdrawal of French and British restrictions on United States trade during the Napoleonic Wars. The War of 1812 destroyed Newport's maritime economy. In the decades following, Newport's economic base was weak—shipbuilding was at an all-time low, foreign commerce and trade slackened and building activity almost ceased.

Only about twenty houses built between 1780 and 1825 stand in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood. The oldest of these conform in style to those built before the Revolution. For example, the Gaspar Castoff House, constructed c. 1785 and located at 271-275 Spring Street, is a large two-and-half-story dwelling with a gambrel roof. Other examples include the John Price House (eighteenth century) at 424-426 Thames Street and the James Boone House of 1798 at 422 Thames Street.

The Samuel Whitehorse House, built in 1811 at 414-418 Thames Street, and the stone Robert Lee House (1834), at 465 Spring Street, are the only Federal mansions built in the area. Although conjecturally renovated by the Newport Restoration Foundation as a museum displaying Newport furniture, the history of the Whitehorse House is most interesting as a reflection of Newport's weakened economy at the time it was built. Not only was this large, three-story brick residence a rarity in the community, its original owner—a merchant whose business involvements included a distillery, shipping, an iron foundry, a machine shop and a bank—went bankrupt before the house was completed.



Fig. 13: View of Thames Street. From left to right: #424-426, the James Boone House (1798); #424-426, the John Price House (c. 1780); #428, the Henry Hunter House (before 1756).



Fig. 14: William Mansfield House (probably mid-eighteenth century), 12 Dennison Street; moved here in 1836.

The Samuel Durfee House (1803) at 352 Spring Street and the c. 1800 house at 27 Gidley Street are well preserved examples of more representative Federal domestic architecture. Both are two-and-a-half stories with gable roofs and pedimented doorways pierced by semi-circular, leaded-glass fanlights inspired by English pattern books. The Charles Russell House (c. 1800) at 28 Pope Street typifies the simplest Federal-style houses built in the neighborhood.



Fig. 15: Samuel Durfee House (1803), 352 Spring Street; front entrance.

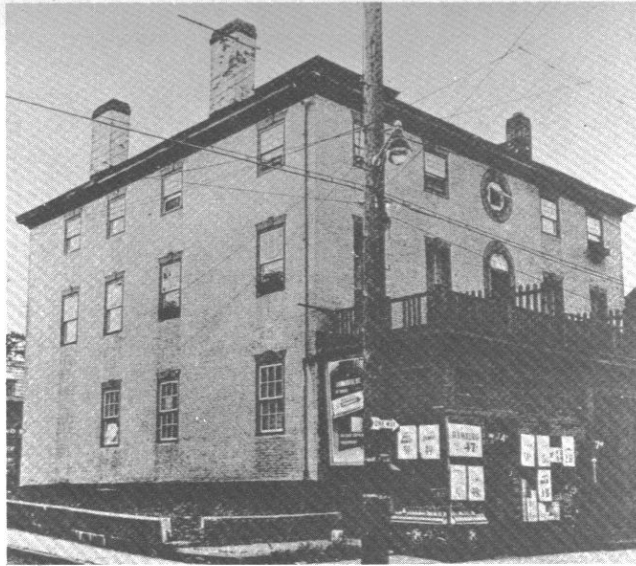


Fig. 16: Samuel Whitehome House (1811), 414-418 Thames Street, before renovation.



Fig. 17: Samuel Whitehome House (1811), 414-418 Thames Street, after renovation.



Fig. 18: Robert Lee House (1834), 465 Spring Street.

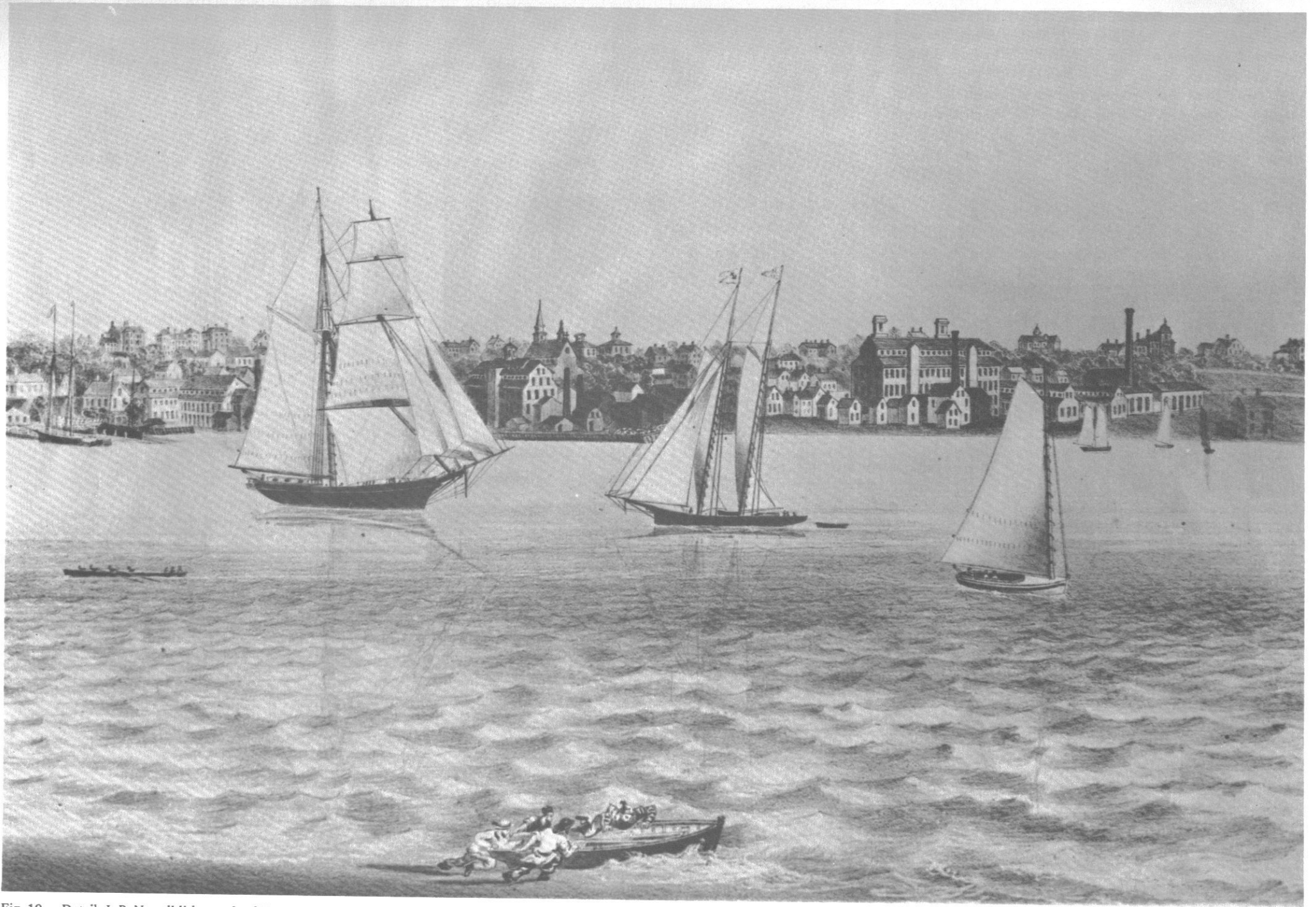


Fig. 19: Detail, J. P. Newell lithograph of Newport Harbor (c. 1860). The Southern Thames Street area, with its waterfront mills, is visible in the background, with the Bellevue Avenue mansions atop the hill.