

NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT: 1850-1975

The physical growth of the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood can best be analyzed through a study of the interrelated development of its three subsections: the waterfront, the business district and the residential area.

The Waterfront

The waterfront's existing alleys and wharfs were all present by 1870. Perry Mill Wharf, Brown and Howard Wharf, Lee's Wharf, West Howard Wharf, Spring Wharf, West Extension Street, Waite's Wharf and Coddington Wharf were in existence before 1850; Ann Street Pier was constructed before 1860; by 1870, Taylor Court was laid out. The area also accommodated a variety of industries and commercial enterprises during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Perry and Richmond Manufacturing Companies, owners of the Perry and Aquidneck (formerly Newport Steam) mills, respectively, continued to manufacture cotton goods. The Perry Mill specialized in print cloths. In 1878, the mill employed about 150 operatives. About 175 workers manned the Aquidneck Mill. Both mills closed before the end of the century; in 1892, the Newport Illuminating Company purchased Aquidneck Mill and, by 1900, William P. Sheffield purchased the Perry Mill. Both were converted to new uses.

In the early 1870s, the Richmond Manufacturing Company established an enamel factory on the site of the Coddington Mill, and John N. A. Griswold, one of Newport's largest property holders, established the Newport Lead and Shot Company on Thames Street just south of Aquidneck Mill. Griswold also developed a large wharf between West Extension Street and Spring Wharf. Silas H. Cottrell's Ship Yard and Marine Railway, which was established before 1850, continued to operate through the 1870s, succeeded in the early twentieth century by the Newport Shipyard and Marine Railway. Brown and Howard owned and operated a coal yard on the company's wharf from the early 1870s through the early twentieth century.

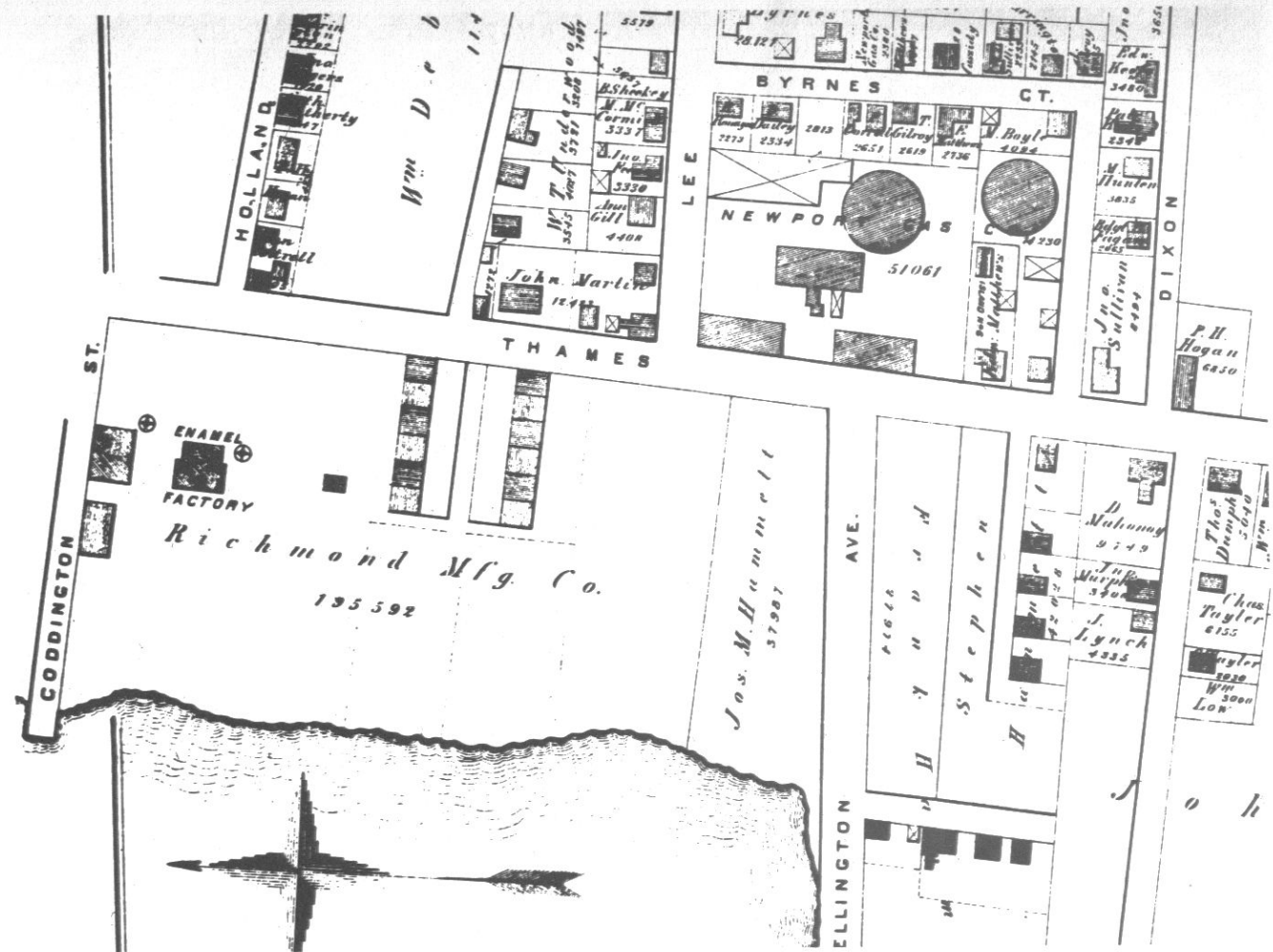


Fig. 24: Detail, plate B, Hopkins 1876 Newport atlas. Note the industrial structures along the waterfront and the preponderance of Irish residents living on the side streets.



Fig. 25: Newport Shipyard, now Newport Offshore Ltd. This property has been a shipyard since 1834 when it was purchased by Silas Cottrell. In the mid-18th century merchant Josiah Brown's wharf was located here.

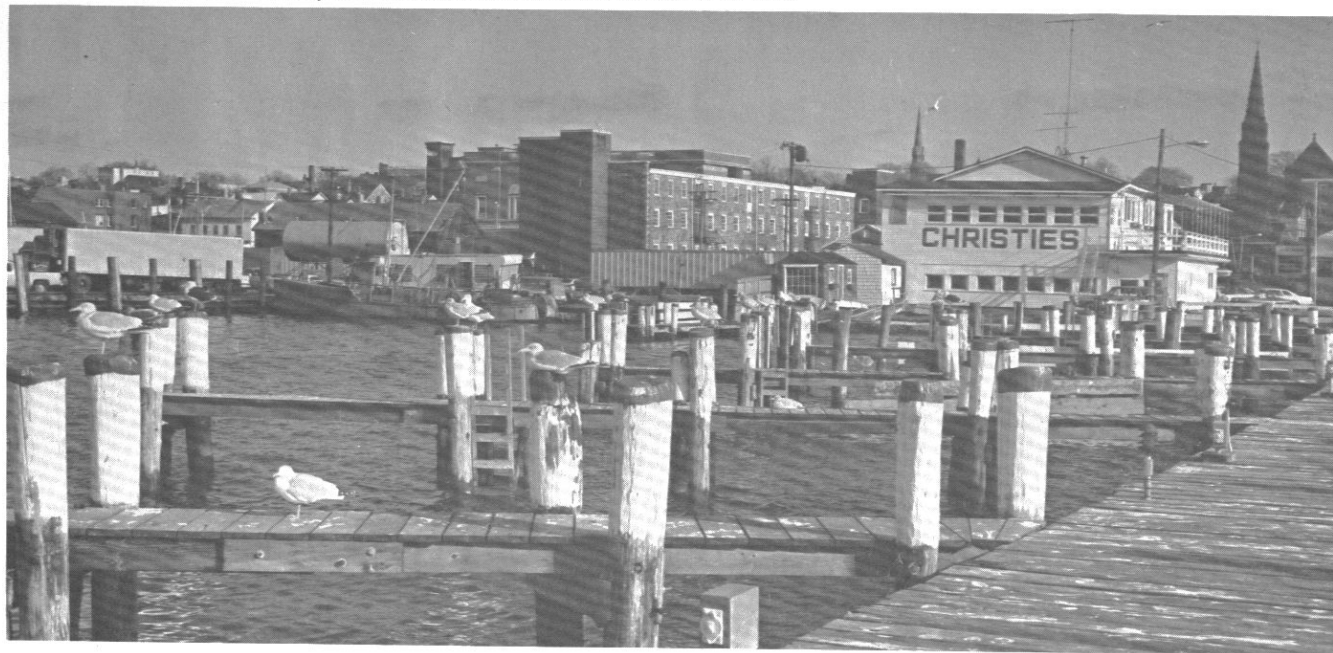


Fig. 26: View from Hammett's Wharf, showing (from left to right) the Perry Mill as it exists today, Christie's Restaurant and St. Mary's Church.

The Staples Coal Company opened a yard between Spring Wharf and West Extension Street, and, in 1907, the Standard Oil Company installed oil tanks and warehouses at the end of Waite's Wharf.

The Newport Gas-Light Company (est. 1853) purchased the enamel factory from the Richmond Manufacturing Company in the early 1880s and expanded their gas-manufacturing plant, having obtained the exclusive privilege of piping gas throughout the city. They continued to provide Newport with gas until 1975, when the firm was purchased by the Providence Gas Company. At that time, the Newport gasworks was demolished.

Although little physical evidence of these industries exists today, their activities established the waterfront's identity as a commercial district in the twentieth century. For example, the Perry Mill has been adapted for light industry by the General Electric Company. The Newport Electric Company, which recently vacated its operating



Fig. 27: Spring Wharf.

department in Aquidneck Mill, runs a steam-power plant on Spring Wharf as well as an electric-generating station and a substation which distributes electricity to the entire downtown Newport area. In addition, Newport's boatyards, such as the one opened by Williams and Manchester on Lee's Wharf or the Newport Offshore Ltd. on Thames Street, have become the scene of yachting activity, especially during the America's Cup competitions. Newport's largest fishing companies Parascondolo and Sons, Anthony Bucolo, Inc. and the Aquidneck Lobster Company—operate along the waterfront in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood; they have given renewed life to the city's reputation as a commercial fishing port. In addition, harborside restaurants catering to tourists, such as Christie's on Hammett's Wharf and The Pier on West Howard Street, add to the vitality and diversity of this area.

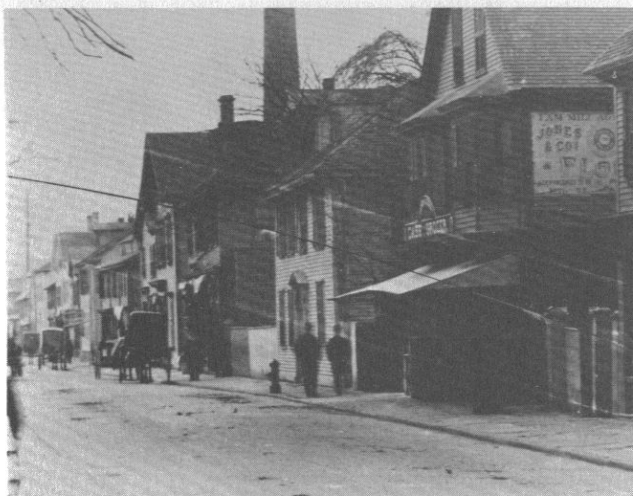


Fig. 28: View of Thames Street in about 1875.



Fig. 29: James Carpenter House (c. 1765, with late 19th-century storefronts), 406-410 Thames Street.

The Business District

Thames Street was the focal point of Newport retail trade into the 1950s. As the Southern Thames Street residential area spread and its population grew, many houses along Thames Street were adapted for stores and offices. Late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century commercial buildings were constructed in response to rapidly expanding needs for provisions and services of all types.

Meat, fish and produce markets, fruit stores, bakeries and confectioneries, dry-goods and hardware establishments, house-furnishings shops, millineries, shoe dealers and pharmacies opened. Builders, carpenters, painters, plasterers and plumbers—busy erecting new structures throughout the city—set up offices along Thames Street. To meet the increased need for retail space and window displays, storefronts were added to old houses; in 1882, the Newport *Mercury* described plate-glass store windows as “all the rage this season.” Plate-glass fronts were installed in eighteenth-century buildings such as the James Carpenter House at 406-410 Thames Street and the Ebenezer Woodward House at 381-385 Thames Street, as well as in Vic-



Fig. 30: The Palmer Houses (c. 1880), 421-423 and 425-427 Thames Street.

torian buildings such as the James M. Allen House (c. 1850) at 477 Thames Street.

The demand for tenements and retail space increased during the 1880s, 1890s and 1900s, resulting in the construction of several boarding houses and commercial buildings within the business district. In addition, merchants who did not live above their places of work rented the



Fig. 31: J. J. Lynch Building (1886), 491-495 Thames Street.

upper floors of their buildings. Local workers boarded in tenements, like the Palmer Houses (c. 1880 at 421-423 and 425-427 Thames Street, convenient to their jobs; and new businesses were eager to rent space from property owners such as J. J. Lynch who, in 1886, built the three-story, Second Empire-style building at 491-495 Thames Street for commercial and residential use. The Bartholomew Building (1895) at 526-530 Thames Street

and the Father Matthew Society Building (1906) at 396-398 Thames Street are both noteworthy examples of elaborate masonry commercial blocks in eclectic Late Victorian styles.

Around 1888, the brick, Queen-Anne style fire station on the northwest corner of Thames Street and Sharon Court was built by M. A. McCormick, city councilman for the neighborhood. William Gosling's design for the Rhode Island Armory on Thames Street was completed in 1894, resulting in a castle-like stone building in which military drills were conducted. In recent years the state armory has become the operations center for America's Cup races.

During the early twentieth century, Newport's summer residents and vacationers continued to help sustain the city's prosperity. In addition, the local economy received a major boost from the influx of Navy personnel stationed at the Naval Base and War College. Thames Street businesses continued to thrive. Residential development occurred in response, taking the limits of the compact part of town further south.



Fig. 33: Bartholomew Building (1895), 526-530 Thames Street.



Fig. 34: Former Fire Station #6 (1891), 595 Thames Street; tower now removed.

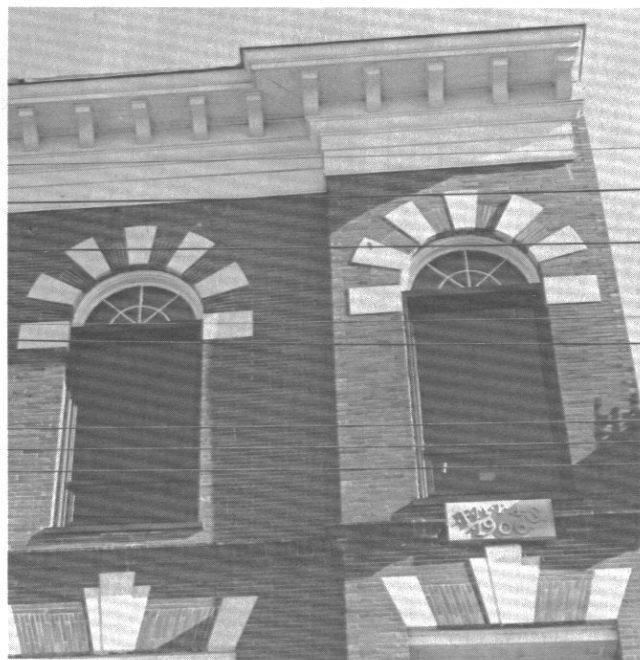


Fig. 32: Detail, Father Matthew Society Building (1906), 369-398 Thames Street.

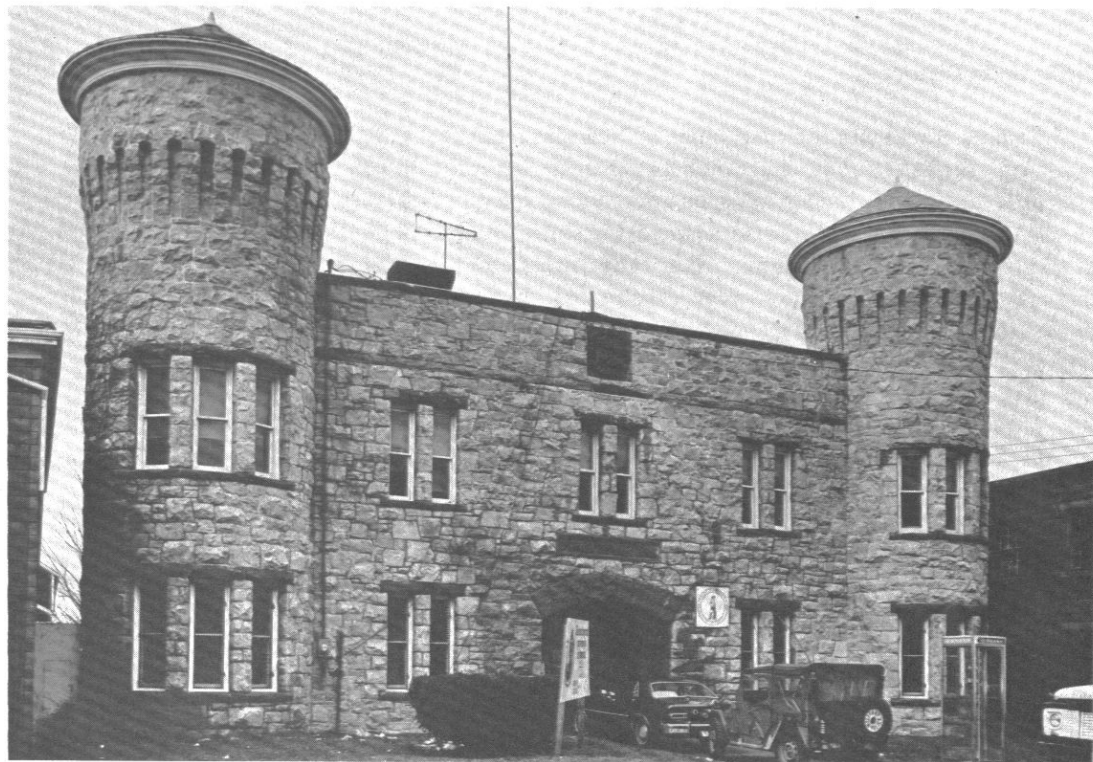


Fig. 35: Rhode Island National Guard Armory (1894), 371 Thames Street.

The Residential Area

Conveniently positioned between the summer estates on the hill and Thames Street and the waterfront below, the side streets of the neighborhood rapidly developed in the mid-nineteenth century, housing workers who served the resort community; factory hands and machinists; carpenters and painters; stevedors, shipbuilders, seamen and fishermen; storekeepers and clerks; grocers and teamsters; and dressmakers and bakers. This was the population of the soon-to-be famous Fifth Ward which includes the Southern Thames Street study area.

Though ethnically diverse, the area's population was largely Irish. Newport was Rhode Island's first community to have a substantial Irish population. Although Irish settlers had come to Newport by the mid-eighteenth century, the first significant numbers of Irish immigrants arrived during the 1820s. For the most part, they came to work on the construction of Fort Adams, and many settled in the Southern Thames Street area—the built-up portion of town closest to the construction site. A Roman Catholic congregation—Rhode Island's first—was established in Newport in 1828 to minister to its growing Irish-Catholic populace. This parish, originally named St. Joseph's and now St. Mary's, had its church in a former schoolhouse at the intersection of Barney and Vernon streets.

The terrible famine of the late 1840s which caused enormous suffering in Ireland induced greatly increased Irish settlement in the United States. Like other Eastern communities, Newport's Irish population swelled as a result of this wave of new immigrants. The Southern Thames Street area, more than any other neighborhood, became their home. The arrival of the mostly Roman Catholic Irish and their concentration in the Southern Thames Street area prompted the construction of a new, more imposing church begun in 1848 on Spring Street. This new St. Mary's, known as Our Lady of the Isle, was dedicated in 1853; the old church building on Barney and Mt. Vernon streets was kept as an adjunct facility, serving parishioners living in the northern part of the city. In the 1880s these north-end, Catholic Newporters were sufficiently numerous to require their own parish, and a new St. Joseph's parish was established, building its church on

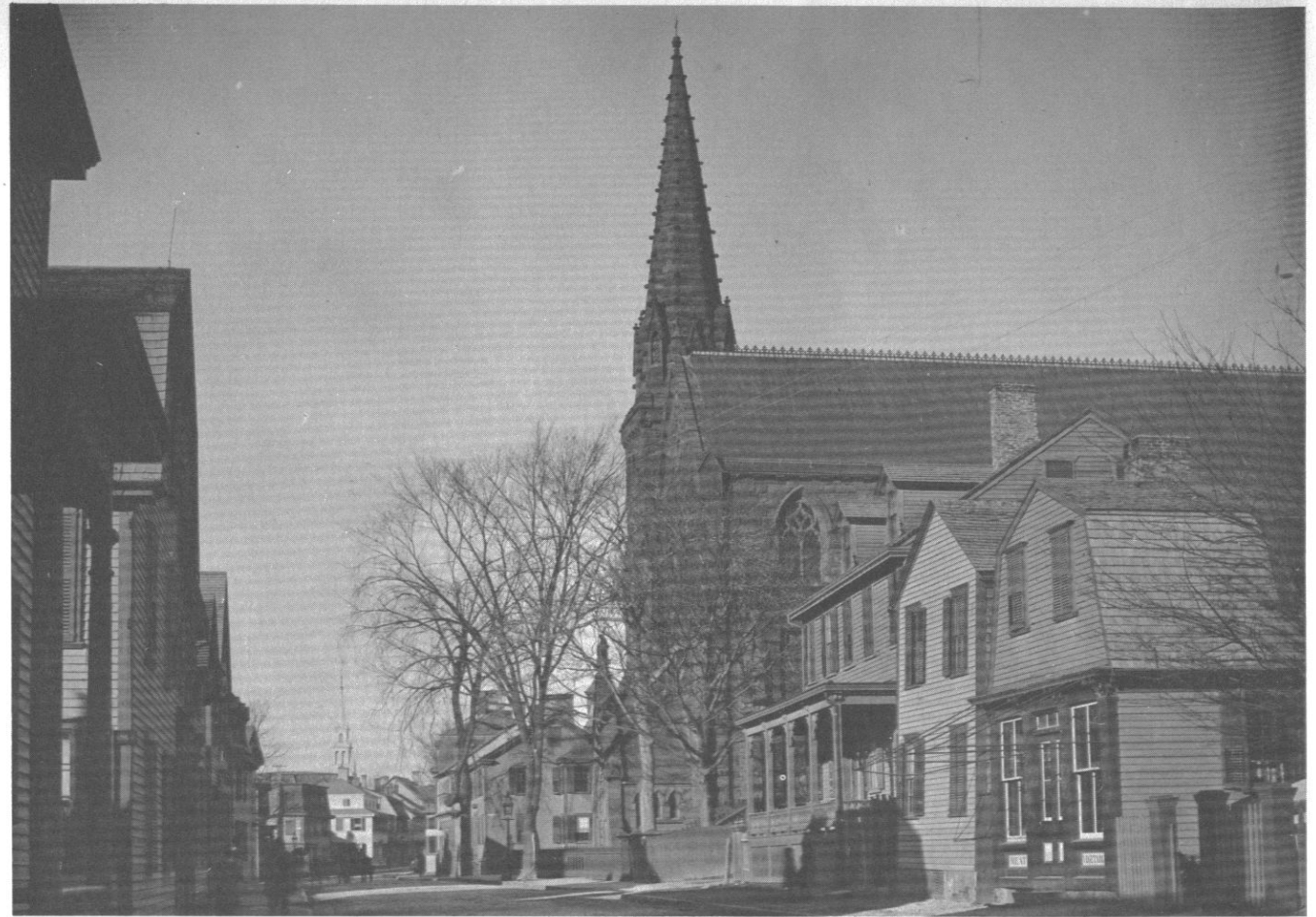


Fig. 36: View north up Spring Street in about 1875; St. Mary's Church is on the right and the steeple of Trinity Church is in the background.

Broadway. St. Mary's parish church, a beautiful, brown-stone, Gothic-style structure, was designed by P. C. Keeley, America's foremost Catholic-church architect of the mid-nineteenth century. The church was built through the efforts of Father James Fitton, one of the most dynamic Catholic priests working in Rhode Island and the driving force behind the creation of numerous parishes. Construction costs were underwritten substantially by members of the Harper family of Baltimore—wealthy Newport summer residents descended from the Carrolls of Carrollton, Maryland, one of that Catholic colony's most aristocratic families. Patronage aside, this handsome building served the South Thames Street area's Irish community, and St. Mary's

church was and remains the most visible symbol of Newport's transformed ethnic composition. The church and its associated structures form a typical Catholic parish complex and possess major historic and architectural significance.

In addition to the neighborhood's Irish population, the Southern Thames Street area had a good number of old-line Yankee residents, most of them with business interests along Thames Street or the waterfront. In addition, many worked in the waterfront textile mills. Increasing numbers of Protestant residents spurred the creation of several neighborhood parishes.

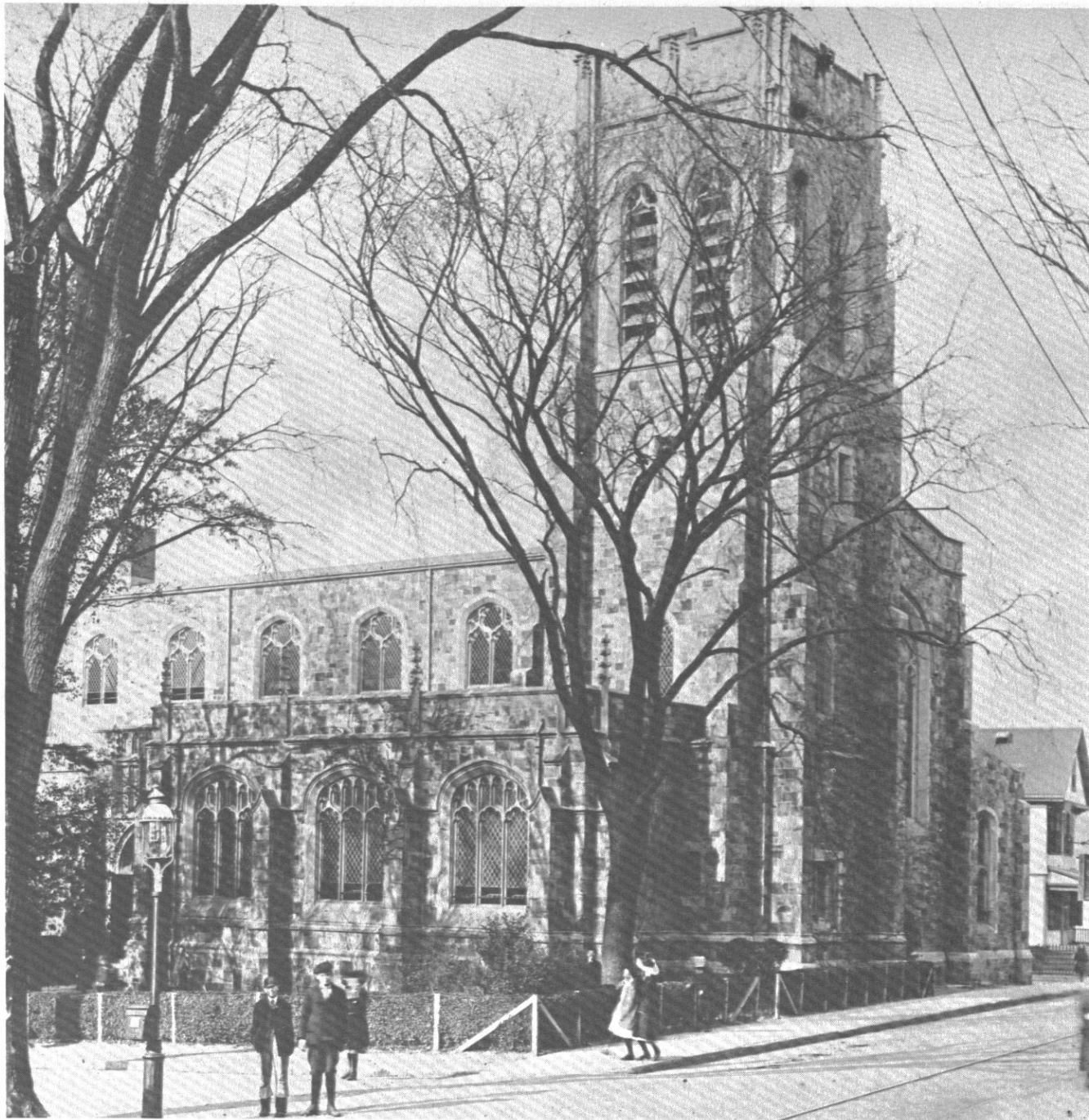


Fig. 37: Emmanuel Church (1903), Spring Street at Dearborn; Cram & Ferguson, architects; photograph taken in about 1910.

The first of these was a Baptist congregation known in the mid-nineteenth century as the Free Will Baptists. Their meetinghouse was on Thames Street but the organization had a struggling existence. In 1850, a new Episcopal congregation was formed in the neighborhood, which ministered particularly to Anglican English and Scottish immigrants who worked in the local textile mills. Promoted by Charlotte Tew, Emmanuel Church, as this new Episcopal congregation was known, first utilized the Free Will Baptist meetinghouse. In 1856 their own building was erected at Spring and Dearborn streets, a building later replaced by the existing stone church on the site. A group of Methodists living in the area—led by Clark Burdick and Isaac W. Sherman—formed a mission congregation in 1854 which later became the Thames Street Methodist Church, with a building at the corner of Thames and Brewer streets constructed in 1865. This building, much changed, is now St. Spyridon's Greek Orthodox Church—reflecting the later arrival of a new ethnic community within the southern Thames Street neighborhood.

The neighborhood street pattern evolved for new residential development in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Thames and Spring streets were extended to the south and Pope Street was extended to the east. Maps published in 1850 indicate that by that year Fair, Gidley, Dennison, Anthony, Fountain, West Extension, South Baptist, Dearborn, Perry and Holland streets and Lee and Narragansett avenues were laid out; some 173 houses stood in the portion of the neighborhood north of Holland Street (to the south was vacant land). By 1850 a public school on Gidley Street and a Catholic school on Spring Street had opened. The neighborhood underwent a southward spurt in development between 1850 and 1878, as indicated by comparison of maps bearing those dates. During these years, Newton, Milburn, Hunt, Grant, Underwood, Bass and Sharon courts; Byrnes, Bacheller, McAllister, Dixon, Simmons and Hammond streets; and Wellington and West Narragansett avenues were developed. Some 208 new houses were built, and the Gidley Street schoolhouse was replaced by one at the end of Newton Court. In 1877, the neighborhood's first fire station was built at 16 Young Street.

As the maps show, the next period of residential development in the neighborhood was between 1883 and

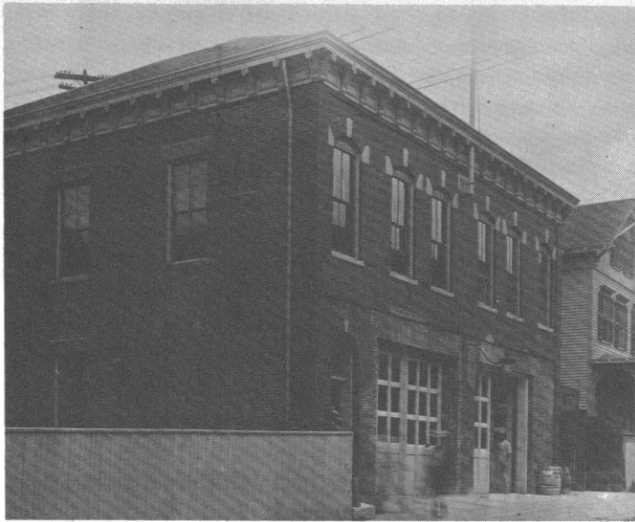


Fig. 38: Fire Station #2 (1877), 16 Young Street; James Fludder, architect.

1907, during Newport's height as a summer resort. From 1883 to 1893, when Dean, Harrington and Richmond streets were laid out, the area's street pattern assumed its present form. In 1883, the city constructed a fire bell tower on Holland Street. By 1907, 270 more houses were constructed and the Newton Court public school had been replaced by the Lenthal School (1886-1887) on Spring Street and the Henry R. A. Carey School (1896) located between Narragansett Avenue and Carey Street. The residential area reached its present physical density before 1920; little new development occurred after that because of the scarcity of available land.

The typical one- or two-story frame houses in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood are rectangular, modestly detailed structures. They are sited close to the sidewalk, either gable-end to the street on a side-hall plan, or with flanking gable roof with side gables on a center-hall plan. Clapboard is the predominant siding material, and front porches with bracketed detail are common; many porches have been at least partially enclosed since the Twenties. Doorway and window moldings are usually simple, and most windows contain two-over-two, double-hung sash. Doors and windows are occasionally accented by clear, frosted or colored panes in geometric shapes. Eleven Bacheller Street, built for John Eagan, a laborer, c. 1865, is a representative example.



Fig. 39: Lenthal School (1886-1887), Spring Street at Perry; designed by James Fludder and the Newport School Committee. Photograph taken in about 1900.



Fig. 40: Thomas Galvin Nursery, Spring Street between Dearborn and Holland streets; nursery founded in 1845. Painting by E. Bierstadt published in Bayles' *History of Newport County* in 1888. Holland Street, the Holland Street fire bell tower, Newport harbor and Ft. Adams are in background.



Fig. 41: C. A. Easton's ad from the *Newport Directory* for 1888.

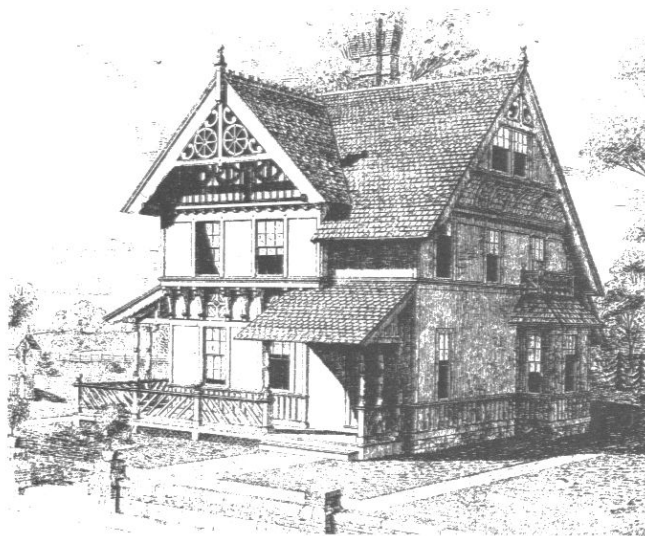


Fig. 42: John Carey, Jr. Gardener's Cottage (1876), 523 Spring Street; Sturgis & Brigham, architects. View from *American Architect & Building News*, December 1, 1877.

In contrast to these, which are so simple, there was and there remains a handful of architecturally adventurous buildings in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood which provide an interesting contrast to its homogeneous residential building stock. Two structures, both on Spring Street, deserve special attention—Thomas Galvin's cottage at 417 Spring and the Carey cottage at number 523. Galvin, probably Newport's best-known and most prosperous Irish-born resident, owned a large nursery and had a flourishing business patronized by members of the summer colony. His beautifully landscaped house, built about 1846, is a picturesque, board-and-batten affair with bracketed trim. It is an outstanding example of the influence of the writings of Andrew Jackson Downing, America's leading mid-nineteenth-century architectural theorist. John Carey, Jr., a New Yorker who was John Jacob Astor's son-in-law and owned an estate which backed up to Spring Street at Narragansett Avenue, built a gardener's cottage on Spring Street across from his grounds in 1876. This elaborately trimmed structure includes early Colonial Revival interiors; it was designed by Sturgis & Brigham, an important Boston architectural firm. A view of Carey's cottage was published in the *American Architect and Buildings News* when it was built.

Repeatedly in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Newport papers reported on the housing problems of the city's working class and the financial soundness of speculative building activity. The *Mercury* stated on May 18, 1872:

There is a larger number of mechanics here than we ever recollect of before, at least 2000 more than last year. Most of these are boarding, but many are desirous of going to house-keeping, but find it impossible to procure tenements Real estate will now pay a good percentage without trouble of finding tenants and there is every reason to believe that there will be in the future an increase in the valuation of all property in the city.

In response to the housing shortage, local investors built rental property throughout the Southern Thames Street area. Tenements such as the pair of distinctively detailed buildings which William S. Cranston built in the early 1870s at 343 and 345 Spring Street or the modest houses William Oman built in about 1879 at 23 and 25 Fair Street typify this phenomenon. In the early twentieth century, tenements such as Catherine O'Neil's duplex house (c. 1914) at 404 Spring Street were built until land for new construction was exhausted.

Between 1870 and 1915, single-family houses continued to be built in the neighborhood for local workers and business people. The C. M. Sullivan House (c. 1888) at 38 Hammond Street is a good example of the Late Victorian residences which were built during this period. It is a one-and-a-half-story cottage with simple detailing, a gable roof and an open porch with bracketed posts and a turned-baluster railing.



Fig. 43: John Howard House (c. 1870; altered c. 1880), 375 Spring Street.

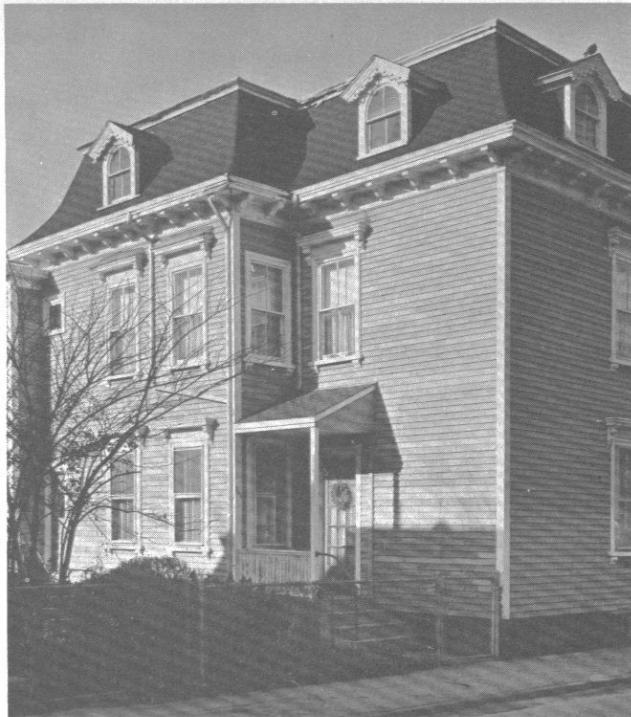


Fig. 44: William S. Cranston House (c. 1873), 343 Spring Street.

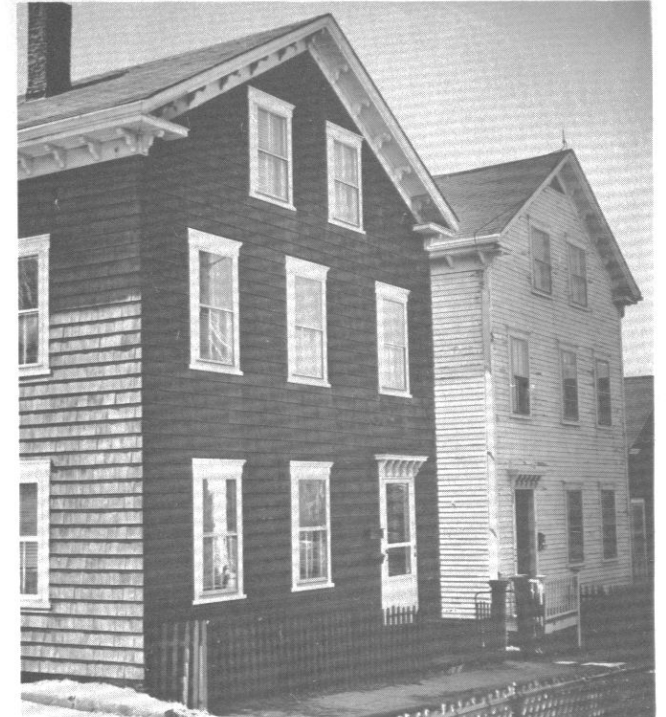


Fig. 45: William Oman Houses (c. 1878), 23 and 25 Fair Street.



Fig. 46: Catherine M. Sullivan House (c. 1888), 38 Hammond Street.



Fig. 47: Sullivan House (c. 1898), 30 Narragansett Avenue.



Fig. 48: J. B. Parsonage House (c. 1900), 525 Spring Street.

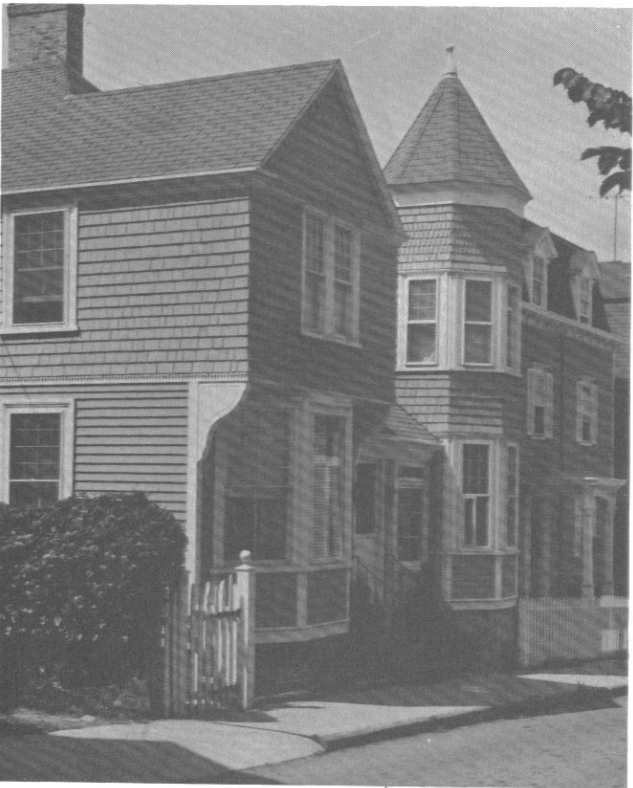


Fig. 51: F. S. Burdick House (c. 1885), 43 Howard Street.



Fig. 49: 28 Pope Street (c. 1800), before restoration.

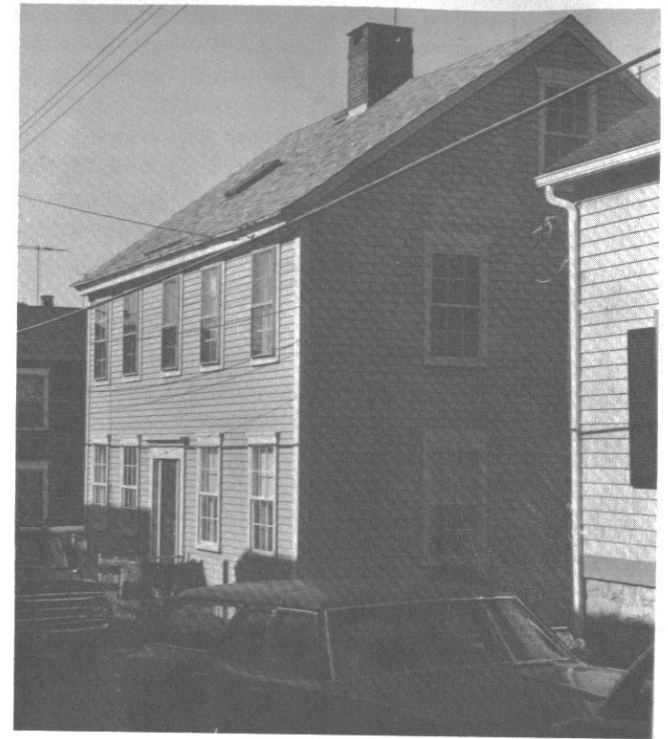


Fig. 50: 28 Pope Street (c. 1800), after restoration.

Although houses of this type were the most common throughout the area, a few more elaborate residences were also constructed. The James D. Hidler House (c. 1880) at 28 Fair Street and the Holland House (c. 1889) at 40 Hammond Street are noteworthy examples of Second Empire buildings characterized by decorative bracketing, mansard roofs and gabled dormers. The Queen Anne style became fashionable during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The J. B. Parsonage House (c. 1900) at 525 Spring Street, an imposing two-and-a-half-story residence, is distinguished by its irregular massing; bay windows, a large enclosed corner porch, a round tower and projecting gables; it is the neighborhood's most exuberant example of the Queen Anne style. Several less elaborate Queen Anne residences, such as the Sullivan Houses (c. 1898) at 30 and 32 Narragansett Avenue, are also noteworthy.

During the mid-twentieth century, Newport's economy slackened—the building boom was over, the mills

closed and the activity of the seaport dwindled. The Southern Thames Street area suffered as a result. When Candebub, Fleissig and Associates analyzed the housing conditions and environmental quality of the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood for the City in 1970, the resulting report, *Programs for Community Action*, indicated that "major and minor structural deficiencies" existed. Another contemporary evaluation of the neighborhood's needs, concluded that "houses (in this area) need a great deal of maintenance and repair."

In recent years, there have been efforts to stop blighting conditions. The Newport Restoration Foundation's work throughout the older sections of the city has included the restoration and reconstruction of a few Colonial and Federal houses in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood. Of much greater importance, however, has been the large number of homeowners who have renovated their own properties with assistance from the

city's Residential Rehabilitation Loan and Grant Program, initiated in 1976 under provisions of the federal Housing and Community Development Act of 1974. The Church-Community Corporation, a local non-profit agency drawing financial support from several Rhode Island churches and church organizations, has a contract with the Redevelopment Agency of Newport to administer the Community Development residential rehabilitation program and has been working closely with the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission to encourage improvements to the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood housing that are in keeping with the historic character of the area. The efforts of the City, the Church Community Corporation and the area's residents have produced substantial results. The deterioration prevalent several years ago is being checked.



Fig. 52: Patrick Sullivan Cottage (c. 1875), 16 Bachelier Street.



Fig. 53: The McKenny Cottage (c. 1880), 26 McAllister Street.

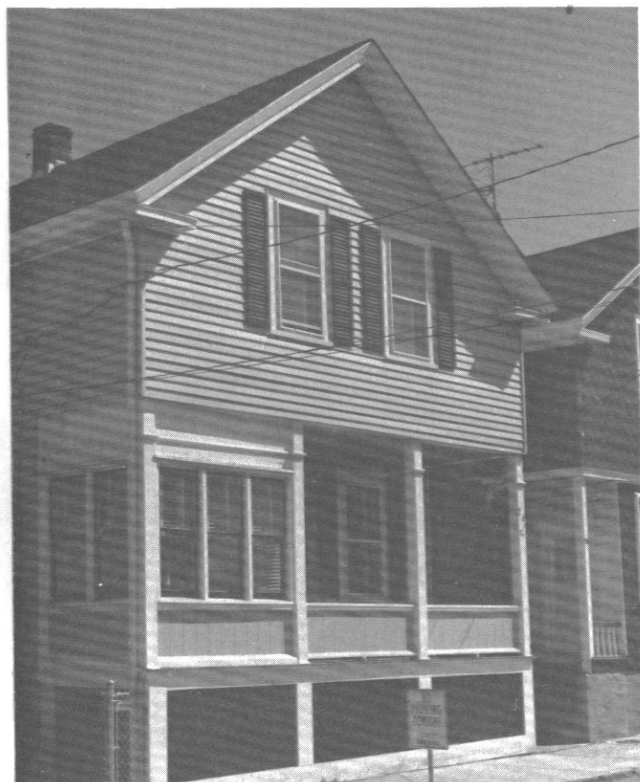


Fig. 54: Mary Feeney Cottage (c. 1900), 26 Lee Avenue.



Fig. 55: John France House (c. 1860; altered c. 1890), 8-10 Howard Street.



Fig. 56: Edward McDonald Cottage (c. 1905), 7 Wellington Avenue.

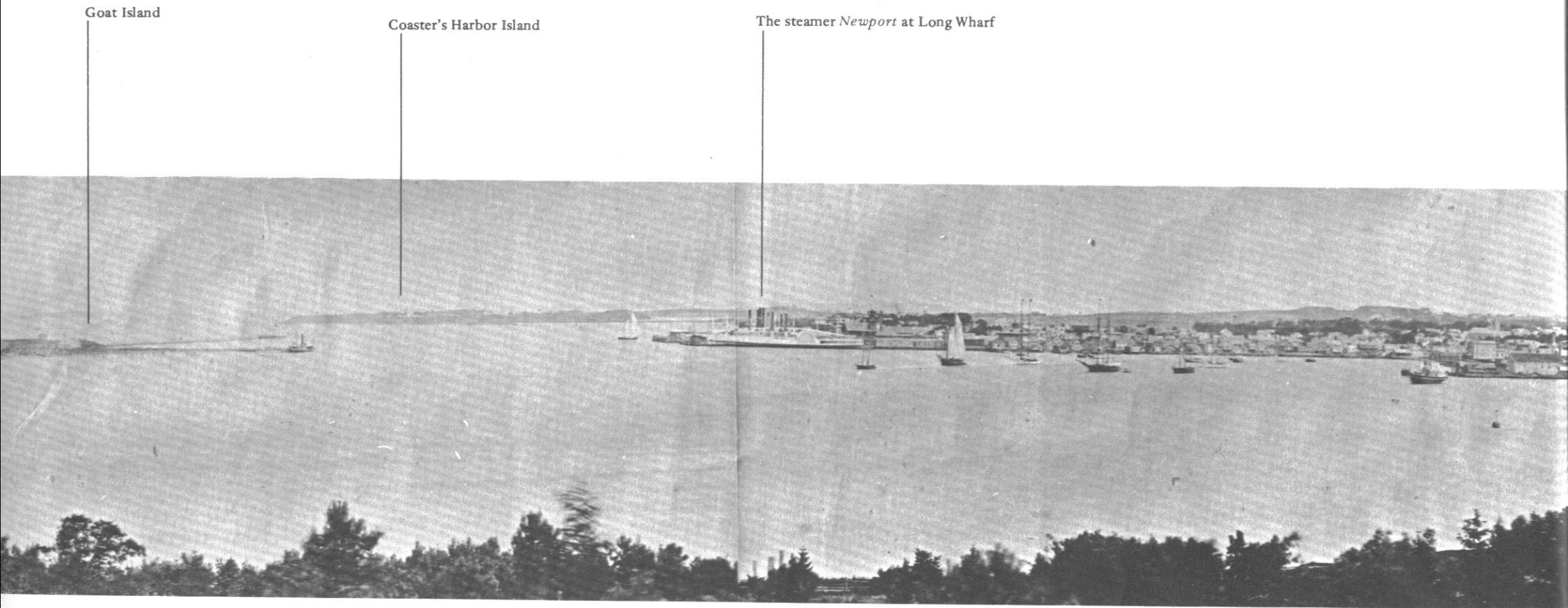
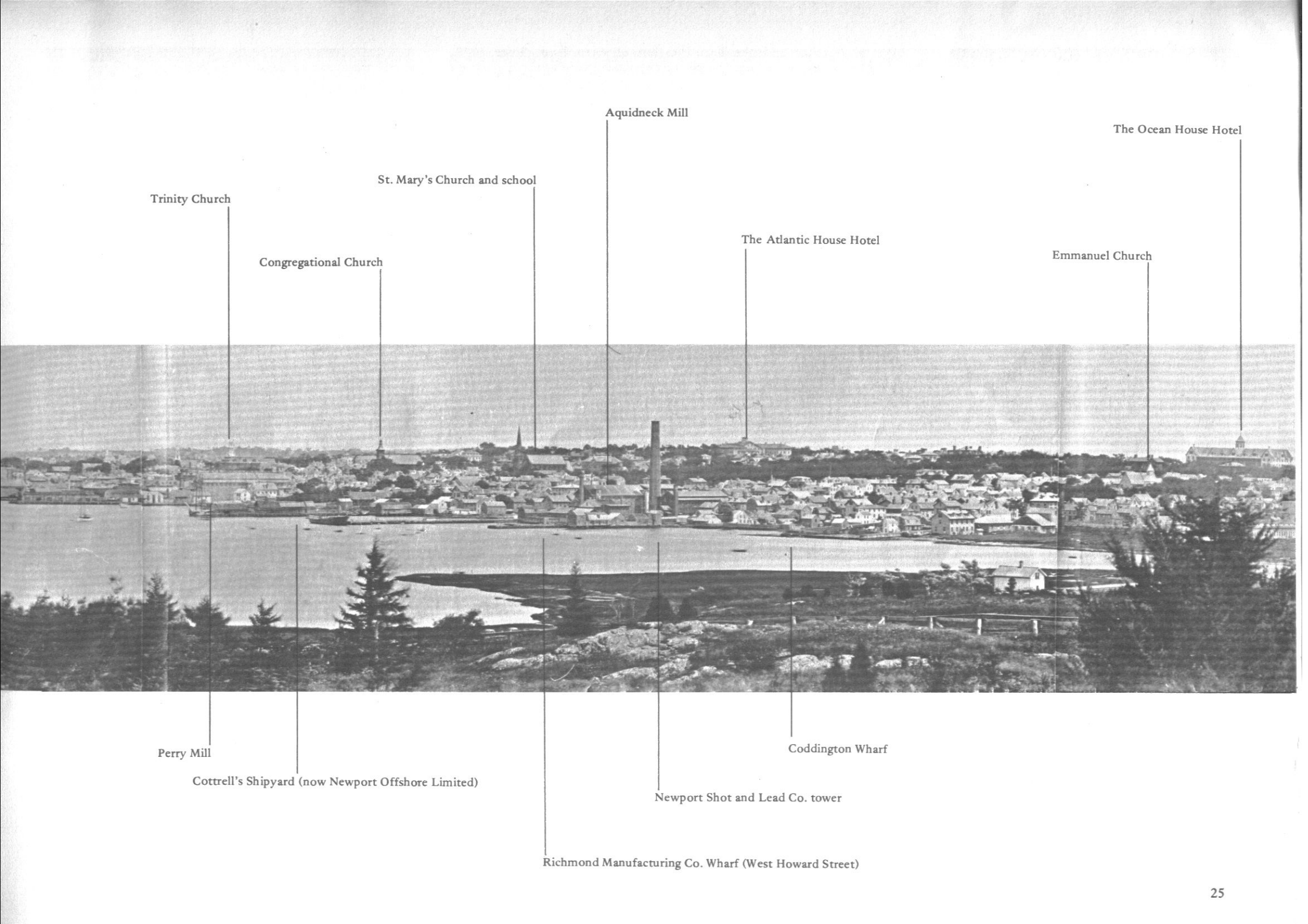


Fig. 57: Panoramic view of Newport harbor (c. 1872) by the renowned Newport photographer, J. Appleby Williams. The view is from Hallidon Hill, looking northeast; the Southern Thames Street area is to the right. Wellington Avenue, skirting the shore, is below the trees in the foreground, crossing a causeway (hidden by the trees) on the right, where it joins Thames Street.



Aquidneck Mill

The Ocean House Hotel

St. Mary's Church and school

Trinity Church

The Atlantic House Hotel

Emmanuel Church

Congregational Church

Perry Mill

Coddington Wharf

Cottrell's Shipyard (now Newport Offshore Limited)

Newport Shot and Lead Co. tower

Richmond Manufacturing Co. Wharf (West Howard Street)