

## V. SUMMARY

The Southern Thames Street Neighborhood retains physical traces of all periods in its development. The residential area, business district and waterfront played significant parts in the growth and expansion of the city's social, economic and civic life. The network of streets reflects the evolution of Newport's settlement pattern from the seventeenth century until the late nineteenth century. A thriving maritime trade during the colonial era created a cultural climate which produced the distinctive eighteenth-century houses located within the area.

In the mid- and late-nineteenth century, the grid of narrow streets between Thames and Spring streets evolved; land was subdivided for intensive residential development; row upon row of simple residences, rental cottages and tenements were built to accommodate the city's working-class population during Newport's growth as a summer colony. Second-generation natives of Irish and English descent, plus new Irish, English and Scottish immigrant workers, made their homes in this neighborhood. Many worked in the textile mills, factories and gas works that were located in the vicinity of the waterfront. The fine Victorian commercial buildings along Thames Street helped to meet the community's new retail needs.

This pattern and rate of development continued into the early twentieth century, roughly until the First World War. The most visible indicators of this continuation are the streets in the south end of the Southern Thames Street area which are lined with houses built in the first decades of the new century. Development decreased in the 1920s and 1930s as available building sites were exhausted, as the activity of the port declined and as the national economy sank into the Depression. The Depression had a critical effect on the grand life style of Newport's summer estates and consequently on the many neighborhood residents whose livelihoods depended directly or indirectly on this economic base. In terms of development, the Southern Thames Street area passed into a long era of slow decline, not reversed until the late 1970s. Today



Fig. 60: West Howard Street Wharf; view west toward the harbor.

new development pressures, particularly for luxury housing and tourist-oriented commercial development, are transforming sections of the harbor front and the Thames Street commercial corridor. There is the danger that, if

these trends go unchecked, they will end traditional waterfront business uses and remake the socio-economic character of the old Southern Thames Street residential area as well.