

Self-Guided Walking Tour of Newport

This tour touches on Newport's 18th century economy, practice of religious toleration, politics and the city's diverse population – enslaved and free, during Newport's colonial period.

Newport was founded in 1639 by religious dissidents who fled the Massachusetts Bay Colony to create a society where religion did not define government. Newport's first settlers agreed to support religious tolerance, or what they called liberty of conscience. This revolutionary idea was codified in the Colony of Rhode Island's charter of 1663, granted by King Charles II. Written by one of Newport's founders, John Clarke, it stated that the colony was established: "To hold forth a Lively Experiment that a most flourishing civil state may stand, yea and best be maintained... with a full liberty in religious concernments... No person within the said colony... shall be in any wise molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question, for any differences in opinion in matters of religion." With the Charter of 1663, Rhode Island's experiment in religious freedom was not only legal, but its colonial government was more democratic than that of any other American colony.

Newport's active seaport and promise of religious freedom drew a diverse population to the colonial city. By the mid-18th century there were at least 10 different faiths coexisting with each other in Newport. By the time of the American Revolution, Newport was one of the five most prosperous ports in the colonies boasting great wealth and culture in large part due to its diverse community but also due to its strong participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Slavery and the slave trade under-girded the entire colonial and early federal economy in this State, even after gradual emancipation laws made enslaved individuals rare here. Enslaved people in the Rhode Island included Native peoples and people of African descent. At the same time that there was a large population of enslaved people in Newport, there was also a growing number of free people of color. People of African descent were as much as 25% of the population at times.

Enslaved people in the city of Newport generally lived in the same houses as the people who held them captive, and also often worked at their businesses and worshipped at their churches (albeit from the balcony). A large number of people of African descent in Newport were skilled laborers, and many could read and write. Enslaved people in Newport engaged in creative survival techniques that allowed them to find ways to exercise some control and agency in their lives. More than a few found ways to obtain their freedom, often by buying themselves from their owners.

Slavery ended in Newport based on a gradual emancipation process that protected the property rights of owners as much as it sought to end an unjust institution. While several religious groups – most notably the Quakers – fought for the end of slavery, the growing abolition movement was also aided by a decline in the economic value of owning slaves after the American Revolution.

1) Bus Station/ Parking, 23 America's Cup Avenue.

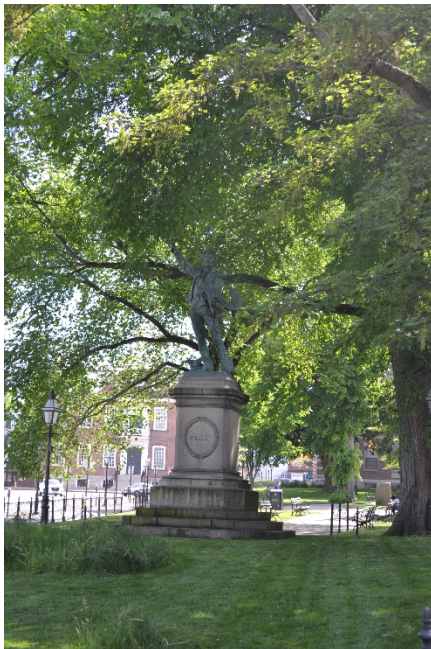
2) Museum of Newport History & Shop at the Brick Market (1762), 127 Thames Street.



The **Brick Market** Building was designed by Peter Harrison at the head of Long Wharf and directly across the Parade from the Colony House. It originally functioned as an open-air market with merchants and offices on the upper floors. It has had a varied history of use over the past 245 years, including a printing office, a theater, and Town Hall, and has also been altered and renovated frequently over the years. In the 18th century the Brick Market and surrounding area was the center for commercial activity, including import and export related to the transatlantic trade.

Contrary to local lore, there is no documentary evidence suggesting that auctions of enslaved people were held here (see site of the Great School House).

3) Site of the **great School House** on the **Parade or Mall** (now Washington Square)



The town school house or “great School House” was built approximately in 1705 and burned in 1774. Records indicate that a school was built on the Mall on a lot of approximately 50 by 60 feet long on the north side of Anne Street (now Touro Street), and as far west as Prison Street (roughly where the statue of Commodore Perry stands today). Newport’s economy was strongly dependent on the trans-Atlantic slave trade whether through shipping, goods bought and sold in support of the trade, or directly through the buying, selling and ownership of captive people. There are records of auctions taking place in Newport, however the selling and purchasing of enslaved people did not appear to have happened in one consistent location.

A 1715 advertisement in *The Boston News-Letter* announced the public sale of several “Indians” and one “Negro Man.” The Great School House predated the Colony House (1739) and the Brick Market (1762), and with the exception of the Friends Meeting House (1699) would have been the largest meeting or public space in town at that time.

Advertisements.
TO be Sold by Publick Vendue or Outcry, on Tuesday the 4th of October next, at Newport on Rhode-Island, in the great School House at two a Clock in the afternoon; Several Indian Women & Boys, & a very likely young Negro Man. All to be seen at the House of Mr. Augustus Lucas, at said Newport, and at the Place and Time of the Sale.

In 1752 local merchant John Bannister advertised that he was selling recently arrived enslaved Africans from the Gold Coast (most likely sold from his ship or on his wharf) and there are only three *Newport Mercury* advertisements from 1758 until 1776 which indicate a public sale. One such advertisement ran in the *Mercury* as: “To be sold, at public vendue, on the 9th day of August next, at the house of John Gould, late of Middle-Town, deceased, seven Negroes, and some household goods.” The more common method for acquiring slaves appears to have been to “reserve” an enslaved person or persons, usually those who had already spent time in the West Indies and knew some English.

4) Perry House, 29 Touro Street

This house was built for Peter Bulioud about 1750 but by 1760 had been sold to Moses Levy a prominent Jewish merchant. Levy joined other Jewish merchants such as Aaron Lopez and Abraham Rodriques Rivera, also living in houses around the Parade. For a brief period after the



American Revolution, the first Rhode Island Bank was located here. In 1818, the house was purchased by Oliver Hazard Perry, a naval hero known for his victory over the British Navy at the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812. From 1901 to 1908 the building housed the Touro Dining Rooms, owned by brothers James T. and Henry L. Allen; it was one of many successful early 20th-century businesses owned by African-Americans in Newport at that time.

5) Newport Colony House (1739), top of the Parade or Mall (now Washington Square)



Built in 1739 to house meetings by Rhode Island’s colonial government, the Newport Colony House quickly became the cultural and political center of the colony. This National Historic Landmark has been the scene of key legislation, important trials, dramatic political demonstrations, and celebrations. Although no longer used as a state house, the building remains the property of the State of Rhode Island & Providence Plantations and is now open to the public under the custodianship of the Newport Historical Society. Master builder Richard Munday’s design for the Colony House brought monumental elegance to colonial

Newport and demonstrated its status as a key commercial and cultural center. Benjamin Wyatt

was the builder; and archival evidence indicates that he employed highly skilled masons both of European and African-descent in its construction.

The Colony House was a center of patriot activity in eighteenth-century Newport. In 1765, Newporters staged a protest against the Stamp Act in front of the building, and the next year, they celebrated the act's repeal inside. On July 20, 1776, Major John Handy read the Declaration of Independence from the front steps. During the British occupation of Newport from 1776 to 1779, the Colony House was used as a barracks for British soldiers. The French forces, who came to Newport under the leadership of General Rochambeau after the British departed, used the building as a hospital. In 1790, the city hosted the new President Washington for a lavish banquet at the Colony House. The Colony House continued to serve as one of Rhode Island's state houses until 1901, when the new state house opened in Providence. From 1901 to 1926, the building was used as the Newport County Courthouse.



6) The Great Friends Meeting House (1699), corner of Farewell and Marlborough

The Great Friends Meeting House is the oldest surviving house of worship in Newport. It was built to accommodate not just Newport's Quakers, but also the New England Yearly Meeting, serving as an annual gathering place for the region until 1919.

The Society of Friends – Quakers, were a persecuted Christian minority who believed that each individual had the capacity to connect with God without an elder, pastor or leader. This resulted in a sense of equality between the sexes, and a form of worship that mostly involved silent meditation. The Quakers also abjured all obvious ostentation, though they were not averse to making money.



New England's early Quakers were often persecuted. Perceived as a radical threat to the stability of Massachusetts Bay Colony's Theocratic government they were often exiled, but found refuge in Newport where its commitment to liberty of conscience and religion provided a safe haven for early Quakers, and the Society of Friends flourished. Their meeting house was expanded in 1705 and 1729 "for the conveniency of the women's meeting." The Quakers became a large and influential group in Newport; both their style and their ideas influenced the course of this City's history.



In the mid-18th century the Quakers were evolving towards a commitment to the idea that slavery was immoral, in spite of Newport's and many Quaker's strong financial connection to the trade in enslaved Africans. The debate had always existed in many centers of discussion in Newport but by the 1760s the Quaker congregation began taking a stronger stand against the practice by disowning members for owning slaves. By 1776 manumission of slaves owned within the Quaker congregation was required.

During the Revolutionary War era many Quakers abandoned Newport and usage of the meeting house dwindled finally stopping altogether by the early 20th century. The meeting house was sold in 1922 to the Community Center Association for use as a recreation center. For the next forty-five years, The Great Friends Meeting House was familiarly called "The Rec." That was short for *recreational center*—but locals mused that the building was so named because it was in need of repair. Early in those years the building was modified to accommodate athletic activities, stage performances, classes and public meetings. Although Newporters from many backgrounds used the facilities at "The Rec," it came to be used primarily by Newport's African-American community as a major activities center for youth.

7) Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House (1697), 17 Broadway



One of a handful of 17th century structures still standing, the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard house has been home to a Stephen Mumford a founding member of Newport's Seventh Day Baptist congregation; Richard Ward a colonial governor; Martin Howard a Loyalist lawyer; and John G. Wanton a Patriot Quaker merchant. It was also the home to Jenny, Briston, Casan, and Cardardo who labored for the families who owned them. Much is known about Newport's economic connection to the trans-Atlantic slave trade and census records reveal the numbers of slaves living in Newport and even where. However, little is known

about the personal lives of the enslaved and what we do know has to be gleaned from the physical and archival record

A 1746 probate inventory of Captain Jonathan Conklin's estate reveals that his widow Ann Conklin inherited "A Negro Man called Casan" valued at 160 pounds; "A Negro Boy called Briston" valued at 140 pounds; and "A Negro Girl Called Jenny" valued at 90 pounds. After the death of her

husband, Ann Conklin married Martin Howard and under the laws of the period, her property became the property of her new husband, so it stands to reason that Jenny, Casan and Briston would have joined the Howard household as valuable property. Ann Conklin Howard died in 1764 and Martin Howard was run out of town in 1765 for his political views. Nothing is known of the fate of Jenny, Casan and Briston.



Cardardo was the property of Quaker merchant John G. Wanton. We know his name because in 1775 rather than be expelled from Quaker meeting, Wanton manumits “one negro man called Cardardo, who according to Law and Custom of said Colony is accounted a slave and as my property. Little is known of Cardardo after he is given his freedom, although it seems likely that he joined a militia regiment out of Taunton, Massachusetts. In September 1777 a Cardardo Wanton enlisted in a mission under Major Spence to attack British forces on Aquidneck Island; he was discharged a month later.

Further evidence of people of African descent living in this house was found under an attic floorboard in the form of what is believed to be the remnants of a sprit bundle known as nkisi, a West African religious custom of the Bakongo people which was sometimes practiced by enslaved African people in the Americas. The minkisi is now on loan to the National Museum of African-American History and Culture in Washington DC.

8) Touro Synagogue (1763), 84 Touro Street

Touro Synagogue, America’s oldest synagogue, is a powerful statement of its time, proclaiming the confidence felt by the Jewish community in Newport's continued commitment to religious toleration.

The first Jewish settlers to arrive in Newport came as early as the 1650s. Fleeing from the terrors of the Inquisition in their ancestral homelands of Spain and Portugal, many of these families came to Newport in time by way of Barbados, Jamaica, Surinam, Curaçao, and the Netherlands.



Through the early and middle 1700s as Newport grew in prominence and prosperity, so did its Jewish population. By 1758 the Jewish community in Newport was strong enough to fund and support a synagogue.

Designed by Peter Harrison, Touro Synagogue was completed and dedicated in 1763, however its use by its founding members was short lived. During the years of the American Revolution, most of the congregation fled and the synagogue remained mostly closed for much of the 19th century. In 1883 the synagogue was reopened, and it has been open for services ever since.

9) **Loeb Visitor Center**, 52 Spring Street

The Loeb Visitors Center is home to a broad array of interactive exhibits that tell the story of how the principle of religious freedom was established in America. It is also the starting point for tours of Touro Synagogue.



10) **Newport Historical Society Resource Center**, 82 Touro Street

The Resource Center is home to the Newport Historical Society's main offices, library, special collections reading room, and collections storage. Collections encompass the five centuries of social and cultural diversity that make Newport County unique.



11) **Seventh Day Baptist Meeting House (1730)**, 82 Touro Street - exterior visible from Barney Street, behind the NHS Resource Center.



In the 1660s, a group within John Clarke's First Baptist Church became convinced that the Ten Commandments should be obeyed literally, and that the Sabbath should be observed on Saturday, the seventh day of the week. In 1671 this group formed the Seventh Day Baptist Church. It is not known where early services were held, but by 1728, the congregation had hired Richard Munday, to design a new building for them. The Seventh Day Baptist Meeting House was completed in

1730 and can now be seen as part of the Newport Historical Society's Resource Center.

The Seventh Day Baptist Congregation flourished in Newport until the American Revolution, AT this time many members relocated to Westerly, Rhode Island, a stronghold of the Seventh Day Baptists since 1676. Between 1840 and 1869, the Seventh Day Baptists rented the Meeting House to the Fourth Baptist Church and then to Shiloh Baptist Church, an African-American congregation. Another well-known contemporary church, The Seventh Day Adventists, split from the Seventh Day Baptists in Michigan in the 1840s.

Since 1884 the meeting house has been owned by the Newport Historical Society, which moved it from its original site in 1887.

12) **Lucas Johnston House** (1720),
40 Division Street

In the years leading up to the American Revolution this was the home of Newport's Stamp Master, Augustus Johnston. The Stamp Act tax was not well received by Newporters, and in 1765 a mob threatened to attack Johnston's home. In conciliation, Johnston resigned from his position and left town. Johnston had inherited the house from his grandfather Augustus Lucas, one of several Newport merchants who profited directly from the slave trade in the 18th century (see #3).

In the late 19th century the house belonged to Armstead Hurley a prominent African-American business man. Hurley was born into slavery in Culpepper County, Virginia in 1854. He came to Newport in 1886 a freeman and started a prosperous painting and wallpapering business as well as becoming a partner in the RI Loan and Investment Co, a bank that invested in businesses owned by African-Americans (see #22).



13) **Peter Bours House** (1760), 47 Division Street (historically known as High Street)



Local lore suggests that Newport Gardner (Occramar Marycoo), an influential member of the African-American Community and later member of the Free African Union Society, rented rooms in this house in the 18th century for the purposes of teaching music lessons.

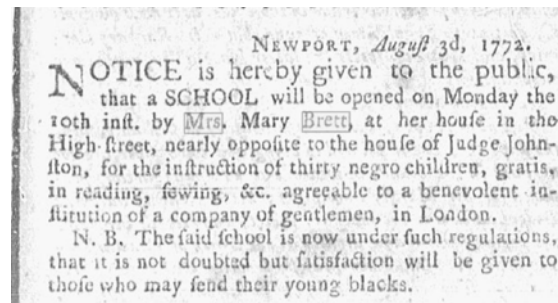
The Free African Union Society began in the Newport home of Abraham Casey on Levin Street (nonextant) ca. November 10, 1780 as an all-male benevolent organization for free persons of color. Each member of the group was required to pay dues at specified times. This money went directly into the treasury to be used for Society expenses and in assisting members in times of need or illness. Organizations similar to the African Union Society later formed in Philadelphia (1787) and Boston (1796), making the one in Newport one of, if not the earliest organization of this type in the United States.

There is no known documentation listing Gardner as a resident at this address, but the records of the Free African Union Society (see #14) indicate that in 1781 the members held worship services here.

Occramar Maryco was enslaved and brought to Newport as teenager around 1760. He was given the name Newport Gardner by the man who purchased him, Caleb Gardner. Although Newport Gardner would take his African name back, he continued to officially use the name Newport

Gardner throughout his life. Manuscript evidence reveals that on August 9, 1792 Newport Gardner was admitted to the Free African Union Society indicating that he was enslaved prior to this point. On August 1, 1793, Gardner was appointed the society's clerk and would retain this position for many years. Gardner was also a teacher, a church deacon in the African-American community, and involved with a movement to return to Africa. In 1825 he sailed for Boston, then in 1826 for Africa with 29 others. Gardner died shortly after arriving at the age of approximately 80.

This house also housed a school for black students run by white school mistress Mary Brett. Brett ran this school from 1772 until her death in 1799.



14) Union Congregational Church (1871), 49 Division Street



The greatest inconsistency in this otherwise tolerant society, was the institution of slavery. With respect to religion, enslaved people often practiced the faith of their owners. By the 1760s a number of enslaved and free people of color in Newport were gathering for their own community and spiritual meetings. This led to the formation of organizations like the Free African Union Society (see #13) and churches for African-Americans.

The original building on this site was built in the 1780s by the Fourth Baptist Church. When the Fourth Baptist Church moved, the Union Congregational Church purchased the building. In 1871 they replaced the original building with the one located here now.

The Union Congregational Church grew out of an earlier group, the Colored Union Church (established in 1824) some of whose members had

roots in the Free African Union Society. Several other African-American churches formed out of the Union Congregational Church, including the Shiloh Baptist Church (see #11) and the African Methodist Episcopal (both in 1864), and Mount Olivet Baptist (1897).

15) **The Rev. Dr. Samuel Hopkins House** (1758), 46 Division Street

This was the 18th century home of Rev. Dr. Samuel Hopkins, a minister of the First Congregational Church on Mill Street from 1770 to 1803. Hopkins was one of the first Congregational ministers to denounce slavery from the pulpit, preaching ardently of the horror and injustice of buying and selling human beings. As a result, many who owned slaves left his church. Hopkins and another Newport Congregationalist minister Ezra Stiles (see #20) aided Newport Gardner (see #13) with the movement to take blacks back to Africa.



16) **42 Division Street**



In 1939 a resident of this house, Mrs. W Berry was listed in the *Green book* as having rooms for rent. *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (at times styled *The Negro Motorist Green-Book* or titled *The Negro Travelers' Green Book*) was an annual guidebook for African-American road trippers, commonly referred to simply as the *Green Book*. It was originated and published by New York City mailman Victor Hugo Green in the United States from 1936 to 1966, during the era of Jim Crow laws, when open and often legally prescribed discrimination against non-whites was widespread.

17) **William Ellery Channing House** (c. 1750), 24 School Street

One of the founders of the Unitarian Church and noted abolitionist, William Ellery Channing, was born in this house on April 7, 1780. His grandfather, William Ellery, was one of the Rhode Island signers of the Declaration of Independence. Channing was the minister of the Arlington Street Church in Boston from 1803 until his death in 1842. His defense of human dignity inspired many, including Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Horace Mann, Dorothea Dix and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Channing's religious views are likely an outgrowth of his experience in Newport, where he received his training from the two very liberal ministers of the First and Second Congregational Churches - Samuel Hopkins (see #15) and Ezra Stiles (see #20) respectively.





This house was also where Charity "Duchess" Quamino lived as a slave of the Channing family for at least twenty years. Duchess is thought to have been born in Africa in 1739. Her husband, John Quamino, was also born in Africa. Both were sold into slavery and ended up in Newport. Their marriage was recorded by Ezra Stiles "1756 Nov 5 Quaumino Negro Servant of Capt Benj Church & Dutchess Negro Servant of Mr. Channing were married with consent of their Masters."

By the 1770s John Quamino had purchased his freedom and with the sponsorship of the Rev. Ezra Stiles he was sent to study at the College of New Jersey to study to become missionary to Africa. The outbreak of the Revolutionary War disrupted Quamino's study, he joined a privateer's crew and was killed in action. Duchess Quamino later obtained her own freedom and earned her living as a pastry cook. On her gravestone Channing described her as "A free black of distinguished excellence, intelligent, industrious, affectionate, honest, and of exemplary piety."

18) **Trinity Church** (1726), Spring Street – Queen Anne Square

Trinity Church was designed and built by master builder Richard Munday in 1724-1726. Its parish was founded in 1698 after the excesses of Puritanism had driven many colonists to Newport. Anglicans followed the other religious groups who sought sanctuary in Rhode Island's commitment to liberty of conscience and religion. As the English crown attempted to consolidate its power at home and in the colonies, it made membership in the Church of England a requirement for all royal office



holders, giving an institutional basis for the growing strength of Trinity. By the 1750s, Trinity Church had grown from a small marginal group to the third largest congregation in Newport. Families of wealth and social status began deserting the more rigorous disciplines of the Society of Friends and the Baptist churches to join Trinity. To accommodate them, the building was enlarged by one-third in 1764, by cutting it in half and inserting the center section. During the 19th century, Trinity became the church of many of the new Summer Colonists and many plaques in their memory adorn the interior of the building. By the 1830s, Trinity had grown so large and diverse that a number of other Episcopal parishes were organized, including Zion, St. George's, Emmanuel, and St. Johns churches.

19) Vernon House (1708 & 1750), 46 Clarke Street



Beginning with the emigration of Daniel Vernon from London to Rhode Island around 1666, the Vernon family grew to become influential merchants in colonial America and then in the United States. Three of Daniel's grandsons, Thomas (1718-1784), William (1719-1806), and Samuel (1711-1792) became merchants in Newport before the Revolutionary War. Thomas partnered with Patrick Grant in the firm Grant & Vernon, which was not successful, and it dissolved in 1744. Thomas subsequently became the postmaster of Newport. Around this time his brothers had formed their own partnership as S. & W. Vernon. The firm was

active in the trans-Atlantic slave trade transporting rum, slaves, and molasses.

In 1774 William Vernon purchased a two-and-a-half story house at the corner of Clarke and Mary streets that he had leased for the past couple of years from Metcalf Bowler. Located at 46 Clarke Street, it would thereafter be known as the Vernon House. When the Revolutionary War began, the family divided, with Thomas becoming a Loyalist while his brothers supported the revolution. Samuel and William left Newport when the British occupied the city in 1776, with William eventually relocating to Boston where he served as president of the Eastern Naval Board beginning in 1777. When the British evacuated Newport in 1779 ahead of the arrival of French forces, William remained in Boston. From 1780 to 1781 French General Rochambeau used the Vernon House as his headquarters, where he met with George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette.

20) Second Congregational Church (1735) / Ezra Stiles, 15 & 14 Clarke Street



The Second Congregational Church was formed in 1728, after members became dissatisfied with the First Congregational Church and its minister at the time, Nathaniel Clapp. Ezra Stiles was offered a ministry at the Second Congregational Church in 1755. The house across the street, number 14 Clarke Street, was built for Stiles as a parsonage on land give by William Ellery and Peter Coggeshall.

Stiles was a theologian, philosopher, scientist, and astronomer and was recognized as "the most learned man in New England." In his diaries and other papers, he reported in great detail on Newport's daily life. Stiles was also an accomplished linguist and was particularly interested in the Jewish religion. Stiles worked with Samuel Hopkins, the minister at the First Congregational Church, to campaign against slavery and to help with the education of African-Americans (see #15).

21) **The Walker Building**, 13 Bridge Street

By 1900, half of all African-Americans living in Newport (then about 1,600) had been born in the South, many into slavery. A great number of these newcomers originated in Culpeper County, Virginia. Many African-American families in Newport today can trace their roots back to this area of Virginia in the nineteenth century.

Lindsay R. Walker moved to Newport from Culpeper County in 1860. Walker found employment as a gardener and a butler. He also worked for a Washington, D.C. employment firm that helped find jobs in Rhode Island for blacks from northern Virginia. Walker was a partner in the RI Loan and Investment Co, a bank that invested in businesses owned by African Americans.

Walker's son Louis became the proprietor of several transportation services in Newport. In 1947, Louis Walker himself constructed this building out of concrete block to house one of his companies, City Taxi Garage. Walker and his son, Louis Walker, Jr. also ran a bus company, limousine service, and another garage on Broadway.



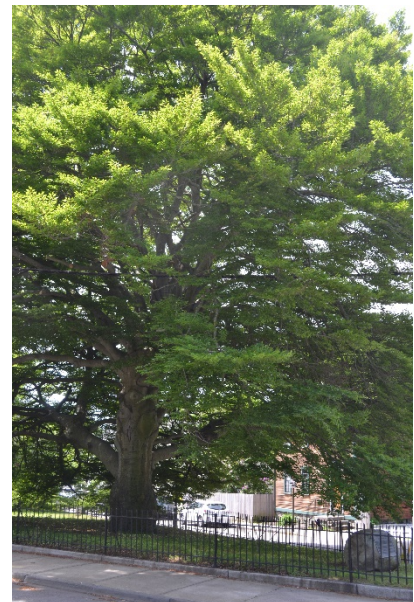
22) **Armstead Hurley**, 6 Cross Street

Armstead Hurley was born into slavery in Culpepper County Virginia in 1854. In 1865, at the end of the Civil War, he gained his freedom. Hurley came to Newport in 1886 as a painter and glazier. He started a wallpapering business at 3 Bridge Street. Like many businessmen, Hurley was involved in several different ventures, including owning rental property at 6 Cross Street. He resided in a home he owned on Division Street (see #12). He was a partner in the RI Loan and Investment Co. This bank was located at 4 Washington Sq, now gone, but next to the 18th century building that houses Citizen's Bank. He was a treasurer of the Shiloh Baptist Church, originally located on School Street. The Mt. Olivet Baptist Church on Thames Street grew out of that church.

23) **Liberty Tree Park**,
intersection of Thames and Farewell Streets

This intersection, now known as Liberty Tree Park, has a history that symbolizes the contradictions of "freedom" and citizenship in early New England. The tree that stands here now is thought to be the fourth Liberty Tree planted here.

Sometime in 1765, the Sons of Liberty began rallying at a tree on this location that they named the Liberty Tree to protest the Stamp Act. William Read officially gave the land and tree to the



city in 1766. In December 1776, a large British force landed in Newport to occupy the town. Gen. Thomas Gage promptly ordered the Liberty Tree cut down.



Before this space became a symbol of liberty for white colonists, starting around 1750 thru the early 1800s, this site was a gathering place for “black elections” or “Lecture Day” for the people of color living in Newport. Enslaved and free people of African or Native American descent, would gather here on the third Saturday of every June for a celebration and to elect an honorary “black governor.” This position was more than just

ceremonial—the black governor would often be called upon to settle disputes or act as an authority among the people of color in town. The festivities included food and drink, dancing, and games, in addition to voting (traditionally only by males).

In Rhode Island government, free African-Americans who owned property could vote as early as 1784 with the start of gradual emancipation, but most were disenfranchised by an 1822 law. In 1842, when the new state constitution officially abolished slavery in the state, people of color were again eligible to vote in Rhode Island.

24) **William Ellery** (house no longer standing), 9 Thames Street

Just across from the Liberty Tree stood the home of one of the Sons of Liberty and Newport’s signer of the Declaration of Independence, William Ellery (1727-1820). Ellery was a merchant, attorney, politician, political appointee, and intellectual. During the War of Independence, Ellery became an antislavery advocate. Although slavery and the trade in human cargo had been common in Newport in his youth, and his family owned enslaved persons, by 1785, Ellery had become an outspoken proponent for the abolition of slavery in the new nation. In 1790, Ellery was appointed as Collector of Customs for the district of Newport. One of his duties was to enforce evolving antislavery laws in a region where such laws were often ignored.

Ellery’s home was one of many buildings that were destroyed by the British during their military occupation of Newport. He is buried in Newport’s Common Burying Ground

25) **Common Burying Ground** (God’s Little Acre), enter from Farewell Street

Newport’s Common Burying Ground was laid in 1665 on just over 10 acres of land granted to Dr. John Clarke, as space in church and family burial grounds became insufficient. More than half the people buried here were born before 1800. The God’s Little Acre section located at the far northern portion of the burying ground is the largest intact colonial burial ground for people of African descent in America, holding over 300 markers for enslaved and free blacks.



