



## NHS statement of Intent regarding the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House. June 2021

The oldest surviving house in Newport, the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House was built for Stephen Mumford ca.1697. Mumford was a merchant and a founding member of Newport's Seventh Day Baptist congregation. In 1757, Martin Howard, Jr., a lawyer and ardent Loyalist, bought the house. During the Stamp Act riots in Newport in 1765, Howard was hanged in effigy on Washington Square and a crowd attacked and vandalized this house. Howard fled Newport under the protection of the British.

That same year, John G. Wanton, a prosperous Quaker merchant, purchased the house at auction. In 1782, Wanton's daughter, Polly, married Major Daniel Lyman, a lawyer and Revolutionary War veteran. In 1807, the Lyman's second daughter, Harriet, married another Newport lawyer, Benjamin Hazard. The house remained in the Hazard family until 1911, when Benjamin's daughter Mary Hazard died.

In 1927, the Newport Historical Society purchased the run-down property and retained Norman Isham, a noted restoration architect, to stabilize and restore the building. Isham, who also worked on the Newport Colony House, Trinity Church, and the Brick Market, was a pioneer in the field of historic preservation, and his mark is still clear within the house. Rather than restoring the property to a single period, Isham chose to reveal many styles and periods, providing a unique look at the evolution of one of Rhode Island's earliest homes.

Study of the house and its grounds has continued during the Newport Historical Society's seventy-five years of stewardship. In 1995, the Society commissioned a Preliminary Historic Structure Evaluation of the house. Its findings were used to secure funding from the Champlin Foundations, the McBean Charitable Trust, and the van Beuren Foundation for a restoration and stabilization. In 1998, an archaeological excavation was initiated on the site and in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century explorations of the unrestored sections of the interior revealed the presence of a devotional closet, perhaps the only one extant in North America, and most significantly, an African spirit bundle under the floorboards of the attic, where it is known that enslaved Africans were living during the Wanton's occupancy.

Today, the house does not have a vibrant and sustainable use. While it is exhibited on our walking tours, and occasionally used for program, it costs significantly more per year to maintain than it earns and entertains only a small number of visitors each year – often under 1,000.

The house is architecturally and historically extremely significant and reflects the entire history of 18<sup>th</sup> century Newport in a meaningful way. But it is too small, too fragile and, in a city filled with house museums, not currently exciting enough to make a living simply as an historic site. Today, while generally well maintained and stable, it does have structural issues that must be addressed.

The NHS, in exploring the potential for new life for the property, seeks potential preservation partners with whom to explore uses including activities like office space, program space and other things we may not have thought of. It is anticipated that such a partner would intend to occupy and use the house.

Currently, the house has about 2,300 sq ft of interior space (not all available for modern uses). It has:

- Electrical service
- A burglar alarm system
- A moisture mitigation system in the basement
- A phone line and Wi-Fi
- Plumbing for previous bathroom and sink
- Fenced outdoor space encompassing more than ½ a square block (almost 10,000 sq feet).

It does not have:

- Water service
- Heat or Cooling
- Fire alarm or protective service

Estimates to address the structural issues, add services, and create more usable spaces without violating the historic integrity of the interiors – which include 18<sup>th</sup> century wall decoration – range from \$300,000 - \$400,000. More detailed information is available.

The Society does not seek to divest itself from the stewardship and interpretation of this important property. Rather, it seeks a partner for fundraising and for ultimate use and will particularly look with favor on other non-profit organizations with missions associated with the history, cultural vibrancy, and diversity of Newport. However, all interested parties are encouraged to contact Ruth Taylor at [rtaylor@newporthistorical.org](mailto:rtaylor@newporthistorical.org).