

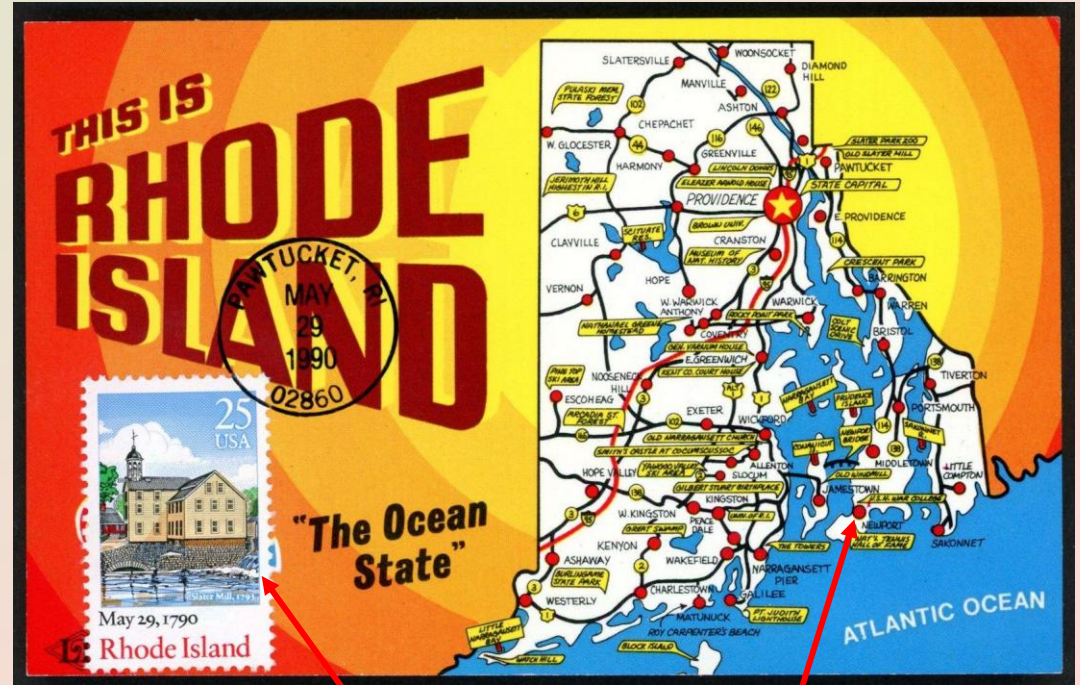
Thornton Wilder and Newport, Rhode Island, in real life, fiction, philately

Rob Sternberg

rs_sternberg@yahoo.com

member: APS, ATA, AFDCS, USCS,
PSLC, ASPP

Short presentation for:
Philatelic Society of Lancaster County
26 Nov. 2025



Scott #2348 (1990)
Rhode Island statehood bicentenary

Newport

Thornton Wilder and Newport, Rhode Island, in real life, fiction, philately

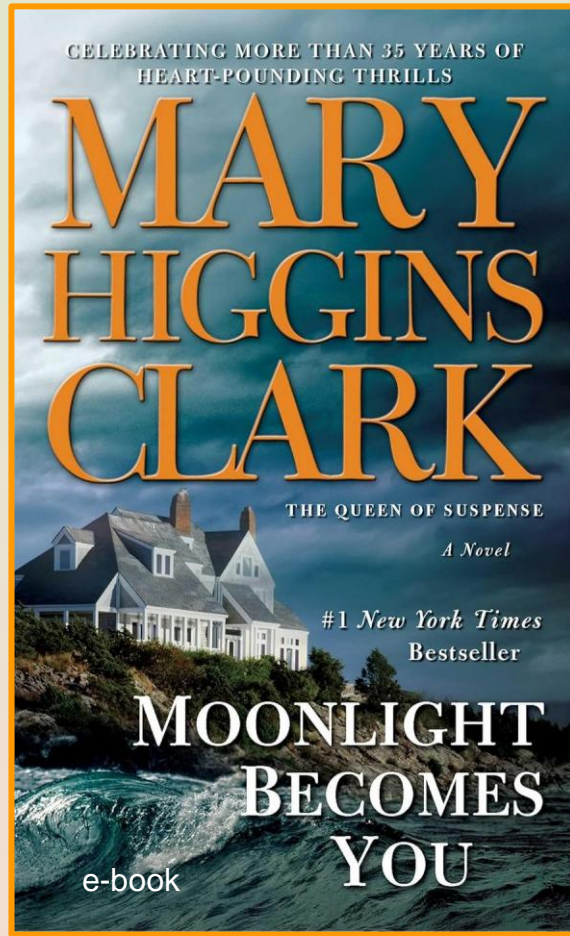
I want to show how I quickly acquired a small collection and developed this presentation based on:

- a trip I made
- a book I read
- and the use of eBay

The presentation includes diverse philatelic elements:

- 1 souvenir page with stamp
- 1 plate block
- 3 first day covers
- 1 stamped postcard
- 2 posted postcards with messages
- 1 posted postcard folder
- 1 signed cover
- 1 airmail event cover
- 1 book
- personal digital photos

What to read on the way to Newport?

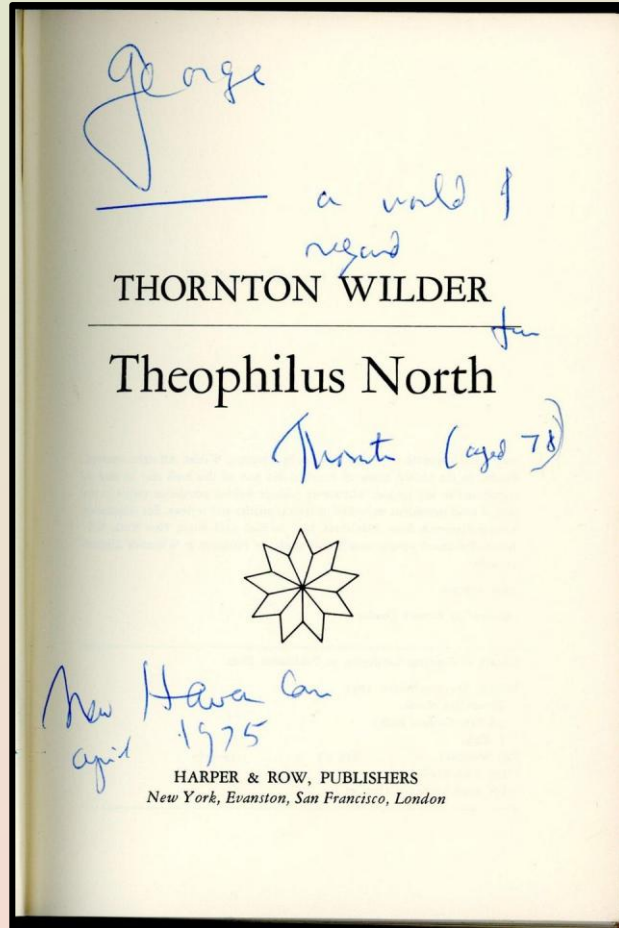
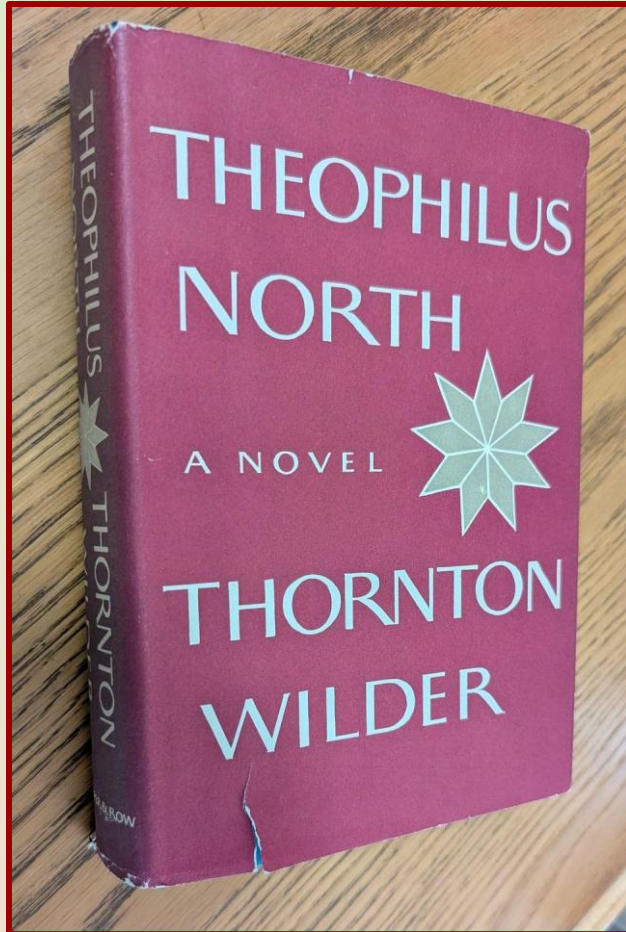


Moonlight Becomes You (1995)
Mary Higgins Clark (1927-2020)
American author of suspense novels.
Each of her 51 books was a bestseller.

As the book begins, photographer Maggie Holloway finds herself buried alive. The story flashes back a few weeks to when Maggie meets her former stepmother, Nuala Moore. Nuala invites her to visit in Newport, but Nuala is killed. The motive turns out to be a real estate scam. Several suspects are offered. One is confirmed.



What to read next?



Theophilus North (1973)
Thornton Wilder (1897-1975).

Bridge of San Luis Rey (1927) - Pulitzer for fiction
Our Town (1938) - Pulitzer for drama
The Skin of Our Teeth (1942) - Pulitzer for drama

This book was Wilder's last, semi- autobiographical, set in 1929 when he spent some months in Newport doing odd jobs. The book recounts various adventures in Newport of the protagonist Theophilus North.

Gift inscription:

"George,
a world of regard from Thornton (aged 78)
New Haven, Conn
April 1975"

Thornton Wilder philately



Copyright U.S. Postal Service 1996

Issue Date: April 17, 1997

First Day City: Hamden, Connecticut

Illustrator: Michael Deas,
New Orleans, Louisiana

Designer: Phil Jordan,
Falls Church, Virginia

Typographer: John Boyd,
New York, New York

Modeler: Joseph Sheeran

Manufacturing Process: Offset lithography

Printer: Ashton-Potter (USA), Ltd.

Colors: Black, cyan, magenta and yellow

Image Area: 1.39 x 0.82 inches or
35.26 x 20.81 millimeters

Stamps per pane: 20

Plate Numbers: "P" followed by four single digits

Marginal Markings: © USPS 1996, price, plate
position diagram, plate numbers

Thornton Wilder

Thornton Wilder is honored as one of America's great playwrights and novelists as part of the Literary Arts stamp series. Wilder is perhaps best known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning plays *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*. His novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* also won a Pulitzer, and another play, *The Matchmaker*, was made into the popular musical *Hello, Dolly!*

Born in Madison, WI, in 1897, Wilder spent his teenage years in China, where his father was Consul General. In 1926 he wrote his first novel and over the next few years wrote scripts (for silent films) in Hollywood. Wilder's belief that life is meaningful only when each moment is lived to the fullest comes across clearly in his literary work, especially the masterpiece *Our Town*. Set in a small New Hampshire town, the play offers a glimpse of American life before the world wars, expressing the eternal truths of human existence through the life events of the residents of Grover's Corners.

Wilder died in 1975 in Hamden, Connecticut. This 32-cent stamp will be issued in Hamden on April 16, the 100th anniversary of Wilder's birth.



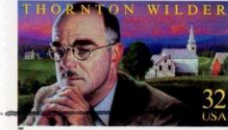
FIRST DAY OF ISSUE

Official First Day of Issue



Thornton Wilder
AUTHOR

LITERARY ARTS SERIES 1997



FIRST DAY OF ISSUE

Mitchell J. Fill
2220 Techny Road
Northbrook, Illinois 60062

Thornton Wilder stamp, US #3134 (1997), 32¢, Literary Arts series

First Day of Issue: April 17, 1997, Hamden, Connecticut

souvenir page: Scott SP1234

cover: Postal Commemorative Society cachet

plate block

Commemorates the 100th anniversary of the birth of Thornton Wilder, playwright, novelist, and teacher

Background of stamp evokes Grover's Corners, the setting for Wilder's play *Our Town*



Nine “cities” of Newport according to Theophilus North

Newport Historical Society

<https://newporthistory.org/history-bytes-nine-cities-part-1/>

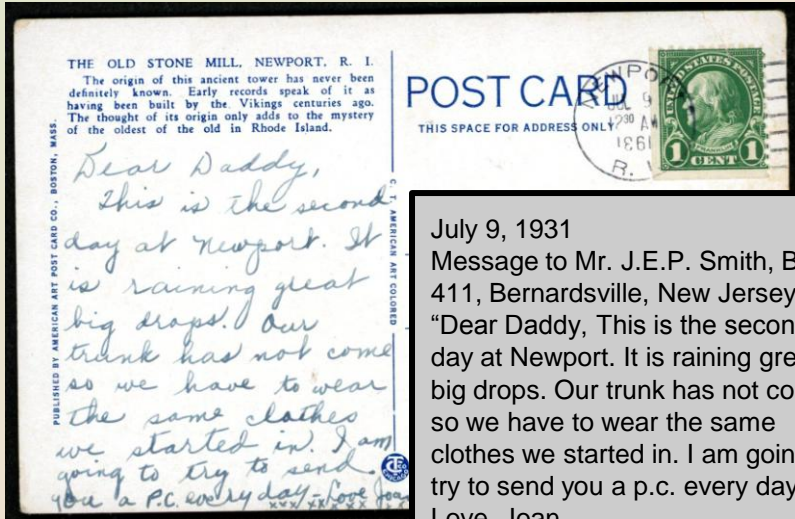
“Newport, Rhode Island, presented nine cities, some superimposed, some having very little relation with the others – variously beautiful, impressive, absurd, commonplace, and one very nearly squalid” (*Theophilus North*, chap. 2)

1. vestiges of the earliest settlers
2. the 18th century town
3. prosperous seaport
4. the Army and the Navy
5. social and intellectual culture
6. the ultra-rich
7. the hired help
8. camp-followers, fortune-hunters, and party crashers
9. permanent residents

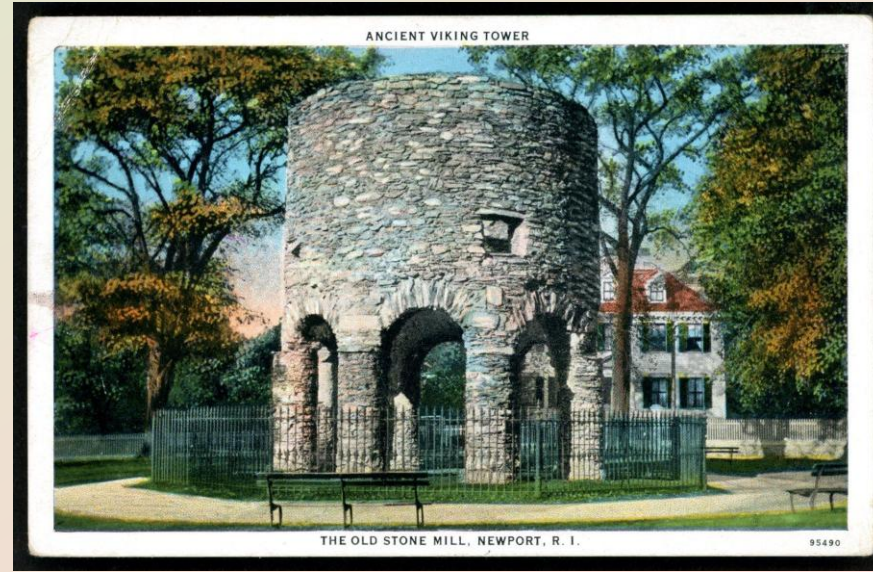
Nine “cities” of Newport

<https://newporthistory.org/history-bytes-nine-cities-part-1/>

1. vestiges of the earliest settlers - Old Stone Mill
2. the 18th century town
3. prosperous seaport
4. the Army and the Navy
5. social and intellectual culture
6. the ultra-rich
7. the hired help
8. camp-followers, fortune-hunters, and party crashers
9. permanent residents



July 9, 1931
Message to Mr. J.E.P. Smith, Box 411, Bernardsville, New Jersey:
“Dear Daddy, This is the second day at Newport. It is raining great big drops. Our trunk has not come so we have to wear the same clothes we started in. I am going to try to send you a p.c. every day.
Love, Joan



Postcard with 1931 postmark
Caption: “The Old Stone Mill, Newport, R.I. The origin of this ancient tower has never been definitely known. Early records speak of it as having been built by the Vikings centuries ago. The thought of its origin only adds to the mystery of the oldest of the old in Rhode Island.”

More recent study suggests this may have been built by Benedict Arnold as a windmill.

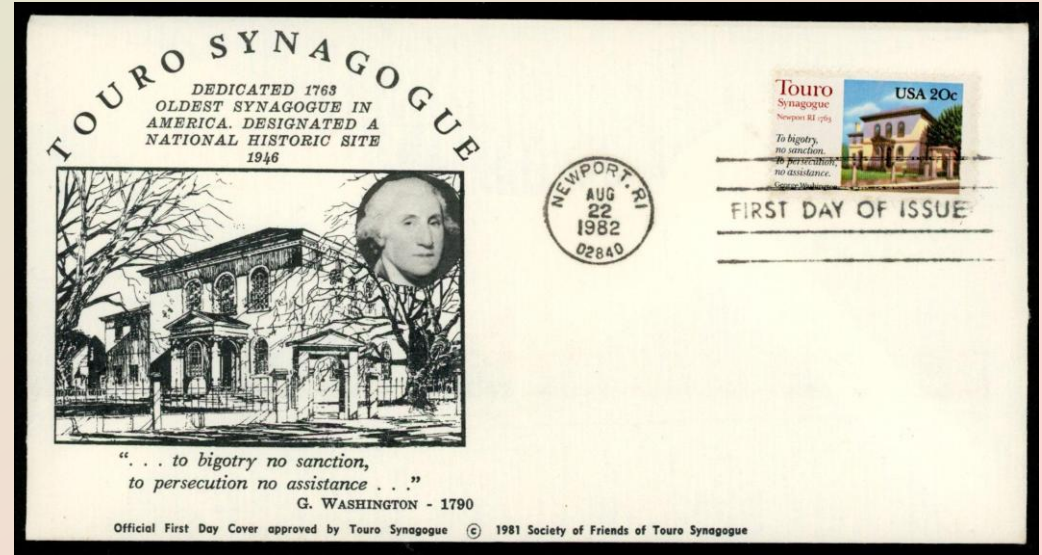


Nine “cities” of Newport

Newport Historical Society

<https://newporthistory.org/history-bytes-nine-cities-part-2/>

1. vestiges of the earliest settlers
2. the 18th century town - Touro synagogue
3. prosperous seaport
4. the Army and the Navy
5. social and intellectual culture
6. the ultra-rich
7. the hired help
8. camp-followers, fortune-hunters, and party crashers
9. permanent residents

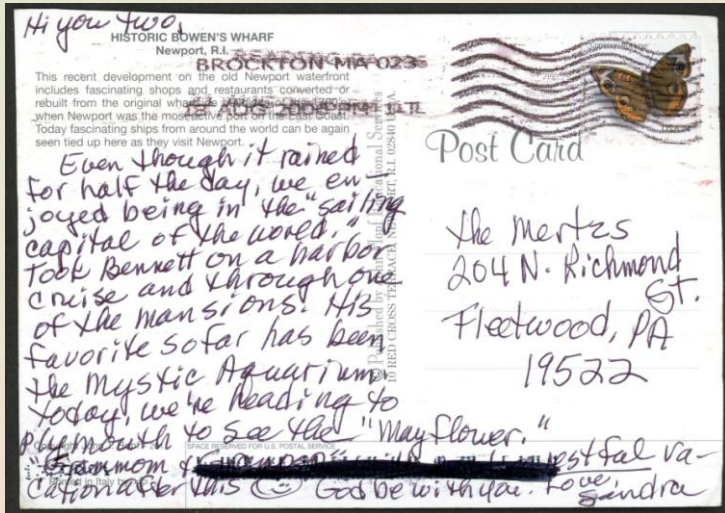
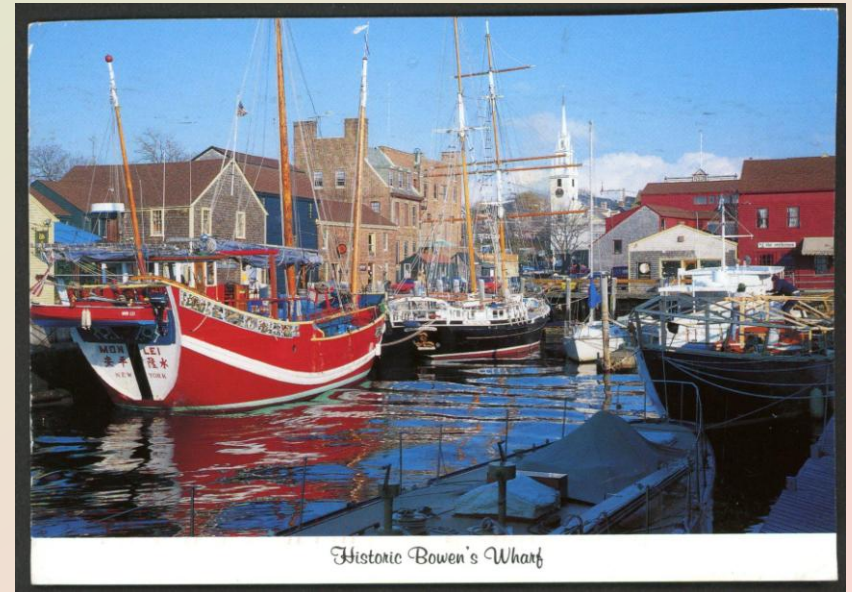


- Oldest standing synagogue in U.S., from 1759
- George Washington visited the congregation in 1790, and later wrote it a letter endorsing religious pluralism,
- Touro Synagogue stamp, Scott #2017 (1982), 20¢, issued for the 250th anniversary of Washington's birth

Nine “cities” of Newport

<https://newporthistory.org/history-bytes-nine-cities-part-3/>

1. vestiges of the earliest settlers
2. the 18th century town
3. **prosperous seaport - Bowen's Wharf**
<https://www.newport-discovery-guide.com/bowens-wharf.html>
1. the Army and the Navy
2. social and intellectual culture
3. the ultra-rich
4. the hired help
5. camp-followers, fortune-hunters, and party crashers
6. permanent residents



Historic Bowen's Wharf

Stamp: Scott #4000 (2006), 24¢ Common Buckeye

18 August 200?

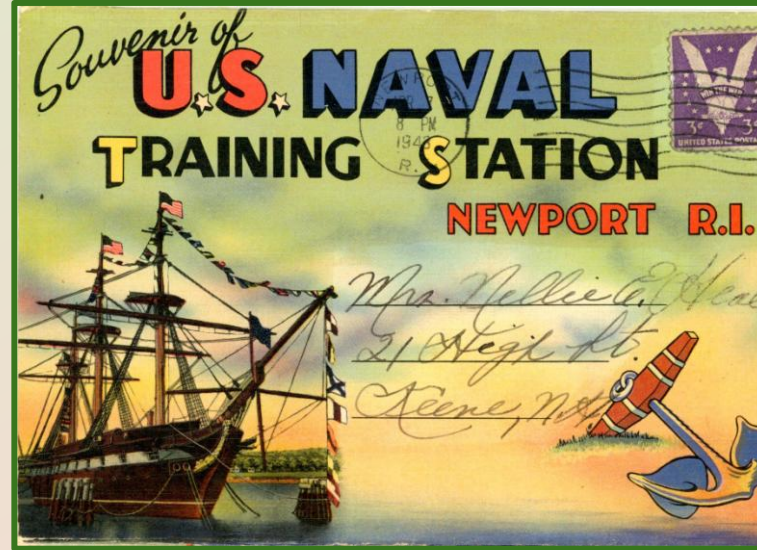
To: The Mertzs, 204 N. Richmond St., Fleetwood, PA 19522

'Hi you two. Even though it rained for half the day, we enjoy being in the "sailing capital of the world" [National Sailing Hall of Fame]. Took Bennett on a harbor cruise and through one of the mansions! His favorite so far has been the Mystic Aquarium today. We're heading to Plymouth to see the "Mayflower." Grammom and Grampop will need a restful vacation after this. God be with you. Love, Sandra'

Nine “cities” of Newport

<https://newporthistory.org/history-bytes-nine-cities-part-4/>

1. vestiges of the earliest settlers
2. the 18th century town
3. prosperous seaport
4. the Army and the Navy - U.S. Naval Training Station
5. social and intellectual culture
6. the ultra-rich
7. the hired help
8. camp-followers, fortune-hunters, and party crashers
9. permanent residents



Scott #905
(July 4, 1942)
Win the War

This mailed souvenir folder had 9 views specifically of the U.S. Naval Training Station on one side, and 9 views of various sites in Newport on the other side.

During the Civil War, the US Naval Academy was temporarily moved from Annapolis to Newport. Naval training ships including the USS Constitution were also moved to Newport Harbor.

The Naval Training Station and Naval War College were established in Newport in 1883-1884, and remains a U.S. Navy training site.

Nine “cities” of Newport

<https://newporthistory.org/history-bytes-nine-cities-part-4/>

1. vestiges of the earliest settlers
2. the 18th century town
3. prosperous seaport
4. the Army and the Navy - Naval Training Station, and Fort Adams
5. social and intellectual culture
6. the ultra-rich
7. the hired help
8. camp-followers, fortune-hunters, and party crashers
9. permanent residents

Naval Training Station



my photo

Fort Adams

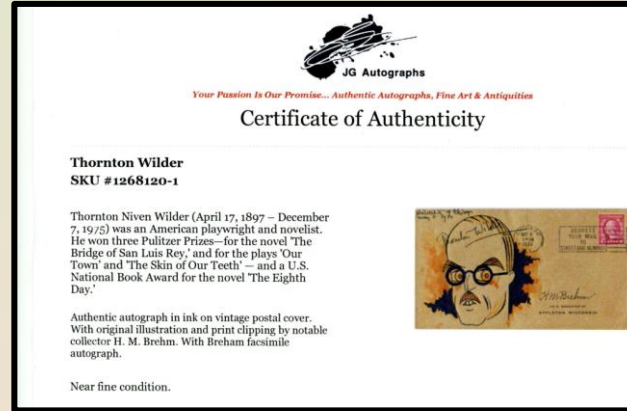
Established by the U.S. Army, 1799-1953
Still used for military housing

Fort Adams State park is the site of the
Newport Jazz and Folk Festivals

Nine “cities” of Newport

<https://newporthistory.org/history-bytes-nine-cities-part-5/>

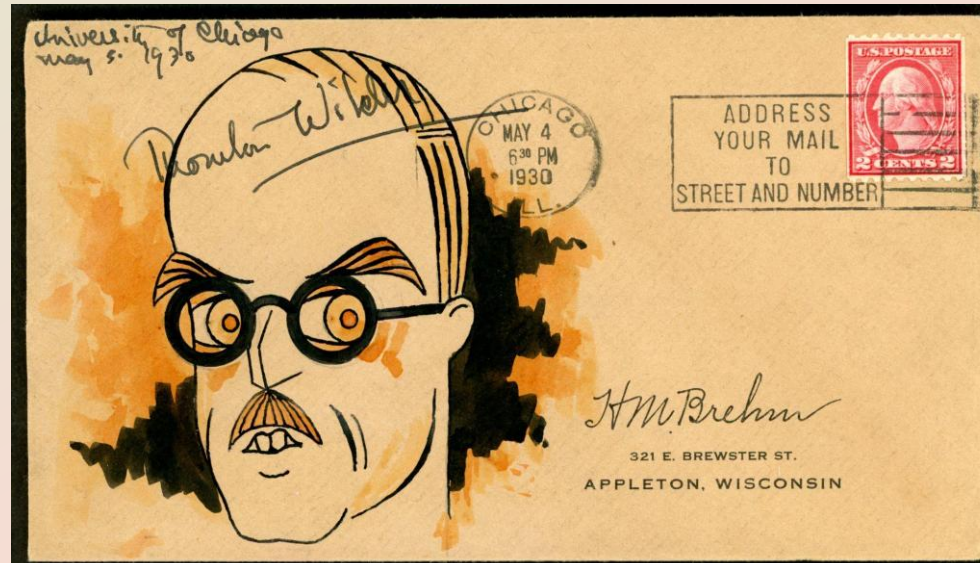
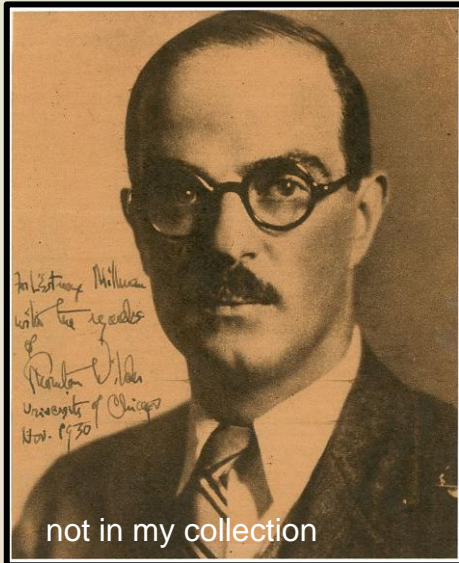
1. vestiges of the earliest settlers
2. the 18th century town
3. prosperous seaport
4. the Army and the Navy
5. **social and intellectual culture - Thornton Wilder**
6. the ultra-rich
7. the hired help
8. camp-followers, fortune-hunters, and party crashers
9. permanent residents



From 1930 to 1937, Wilder taught at the University of Chicago. The signed cover and photo are both dated 1930, from Chicago.

Cover addressee H.M. Brehm was an artist, an autograph collector, and the secretary of the Appleton Philatelic Society. Brehm created drawings of notable people and sent these to them for autographs (worthpoint.com)

Stamp: Scott #442 (1914)
2¢ Washington
Perforation: 10 horizontally



Nine “cities” of Newport

<https://newporthistory.org/history-bytes-nine-cities-part-6/>

1. vestiges of the earliest settlers
2. the 18th century town
3. prosperous seaport
4. the Army and the Navy
5. social and intellectual culture
6. the ultra-rich - Gilded Age mansions
7. camp-followers, fortune-hunters, and party crashers
1. permanent residents



Marble House
dining room



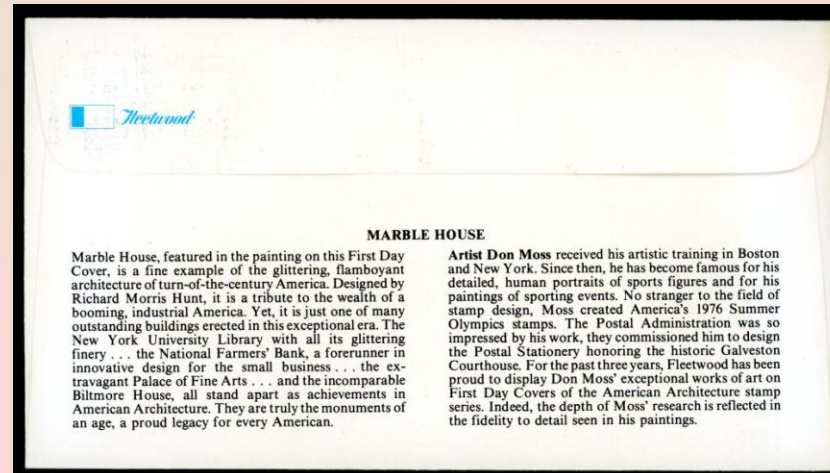
Marble House
kitchen



Scott #1928-31 (1981)
American Architecture

This block of stamps pays tribute to American architecture. The stamps show the Biltmore House (Asheville, NC) designed by Richard Morris Hunt, the NYU Library, the Palace of Fine Arts, and the National Farmer's Bank.

Marble House in Newport (cachet) was also designed by Hunt for the Vanderbilt family.



MARBLE HOUSE

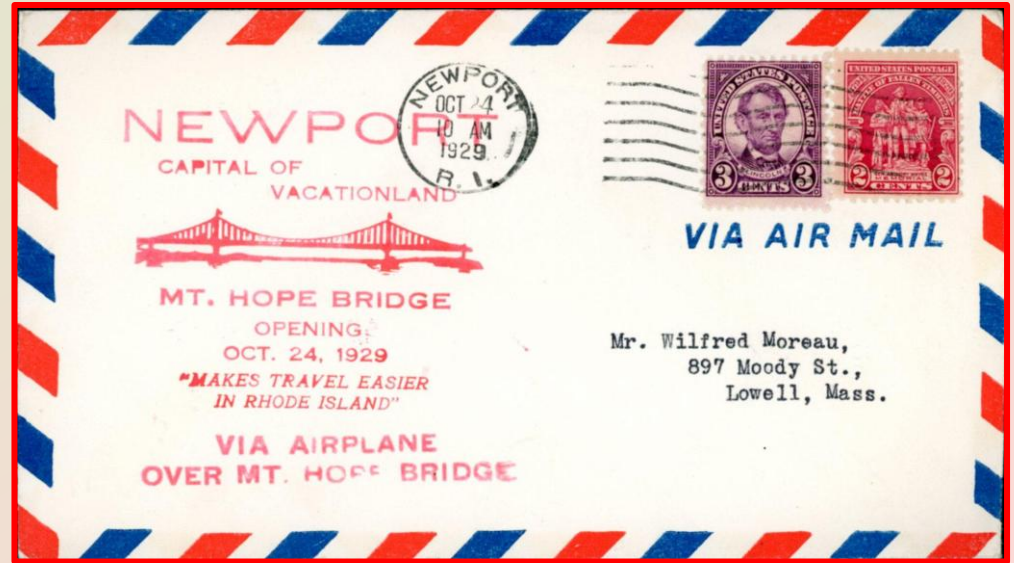
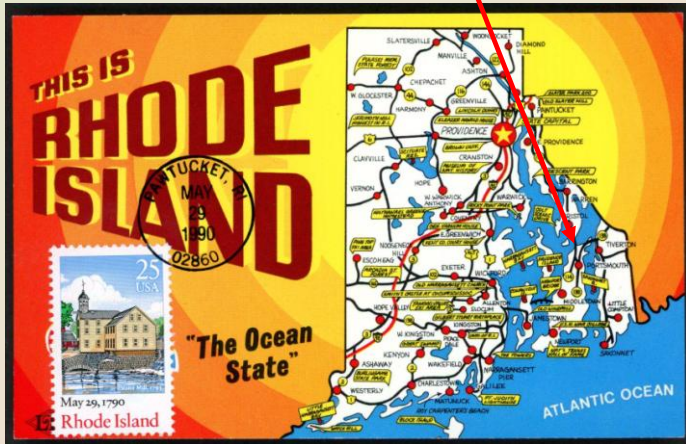
Marble House, featured in the painting on this First Day Cover, is a fine example of the glittering, flamboyant architecture of turn-of-the-century America. Designed by Richard Morris Hunt, it is a tribute to the wealth of a booming, industrial America. Yet, it is just one of many outstanding buildings erected in this exceptional era. The New York University Library with all its glittering finery . . . the National Farmers' Bank, a forerunner in innovative design for the small business . . . the extravagant Palace of Fine Arts . . . and the incomparable Biltmore House, all stand apart as achievements in American Architecture. They are truly the monuments of an age, a proud legacy for every American.

Artist Don Moss received his artistic training in Boston and New York. Since then, he has become famous for his detailed, human portraits of sports figures and for his paintings of sporting events. No stranger to the field of stamp design, Moss created America's 1976 Summer Olympics stamps. The Postal Administration was so impressed by his work, they commissioned him to design the Postal Stationery honoring the historic Galveston Courthouse. For the past three years, Fleetwood has been proud to display Don Moss' exceptional works of art on First Day Covers of the American Architecture stamp series. Indeed, the depth of Moss' research is reflected in the fidelity to detail seen in his paintings.

Nine “cities” of Newport

<https://newporthistory.org/history-bytes-nine-cities-part-9/>

1. vestiges of the earliest settlers
2. the 18th century town
3. prosperous seaport
4. the Army and the Navy
5. social and intellectual culture
6. the ultra-rich
7. the hired help
8. camp-followers, fortune-hunters, and party crashers
9. permanent residents - Mt. Hope bridge



Scott #584 (1925) - 3¢ Abraham Lincoln, Violet, Perf. 10
Scott #680 (Sept. 14, 1929) - 2¢ Battle of Fallen Timbers
airmail envelope, with combined 5¢ domestic airmail postage
postmarked Newport, Oct. 24, 1929
cachet, Mt. Hope Bridge opening, Oct. 24, 1929
“via airplane over Mt. Hope Bridge”
The bridge superseded the Bristol-Portsmouth ferry.