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Editor's Note

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EDITOR'S NOTES

The Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, owned and operated by the Newport Historical Society as an historic site, may well be one of the most important houses in southern New England. It was built sometime between 1676 and 1698, and is the oldest intact house in New England. Its importance lies not just in its age, however, but in the way it reveals so much about the history of Newport.

The house itself is not a high-style, grand house, the type with which Newport is so often associated. It is a modest, essentially medieval house which was changed and adapted to meet the needs of its inhabitants and to reflect changing fashion in architecture and interior decoration.

Despite its importance, the house has not received the attention it deserves. In the summer of 1989, however, the Historical Society hired two bright and well qualified summer interns who, in the articles which are included in this issue of Newport History, made a significant contribution toward remedying that situation.

Ronald Potvin, a senior at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, took on the ambitious task of researching and rewriting the history of the house from the time of its construction to the present. Through careful research he also was able to include the history of the house's restoration by Norman Morrison Isham in the late 1920s, something never undertaken before.

Barbara A. Curran, a recent graduate of Smith College, was interested in the furnishings which would have been in the house during its long history. Unfortunately, no documents survive which relate directly to the house or the families who owned it. She was unable with certainty to state what would have been in a given room at a given time. Instead, she has reconstructed a general profile of what was in houses similar to the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House at a number of points in its history as a family residence. By looking at 70 inventories of houses made when wills were probated, Barbara was able to generate patterns which give a good approximation of what the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House may have contained. The results of Barbara's research are abbreviated at the end of this issue.

Together, Potvin and Curran have given us a more complete understanding of the house and its historical importance. Both authors agree, however, that their work represents a beginning, rather than an end. Further investigation of the Wanton-Lyman-Hazard house will be necessary to answer the new questions these studies have raised.