Editor's Note

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Ronayne: Editor's Note

Peter Harrison, eighteenth century architect and merchant. The painting, owned by Redwood Library, is a nineteenth century copy by artist Louis Sands after the original painting by Smibert.

Photo by Betsy D. Ray
EDITOR'S NOTE

"The architects and builders of the eighteenth century have passed away. They left behind them good honest work. They buil ded better than they knew."

(George C. Mason, Jr., architect)

The cornerstone of nineteenth century architectural development was the revival. Throughout this period there was a recurring desire to look back over the shoulder of historic and artistic time to recapture naive, perhaps, more heroic places and ideals. The mid-to-late half of the nineteenth century witnessed a young America, tired of too much war and too much strife, looking back into its own backyard to the eighteenth century and the simplicity that they thought was the Colonial period.

Owing to its unique character and architectural heritage, Newport became a microcosm of the Colonial Revival and a mecca for young, developing architects seeking to subject their skills and imagination to the styles and theories that were rapidly spreading across the eastern portion of the United States.

An offspring of Newport’s Colonial Revival was some of the first defined, manifest interests in preservation and architectural restoration. A leader in this area, George C. Mason, Jr., along with Mason, Sr., Charles F. McKim, and others, precipitated a strong awareness and admiration of Newport’s fine, pivotal examples of civil and domestic eighteenth century architecture.

In his article, Notes on the Colonial Revival in Newport: Escaping the “Vandalism of Civilization”, noted architectural historian, David Chase, traces the fate of six Colonial Newport buildings and their relationship to the first concerted public efforts toward preservation in the nineteenth century; a testament to the ideal that architecture is, in fact, the legacy and gift that one generation leaves for another.

Opening in Providence, RI on 6 May, 1982 and continuing until 19 June, 1982 Newport and Rhode Island’s architectural past will be the subject of a major loan exhibition entitled “Buildings on Paper: A Century of Rhode Island Architectural Drawings, 1840-1940.” Organized jointly by The Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, The Rhode Island Historical Society, and Brown University the exhibition will include about three hundred drawings, many never before seen, for roughly two hundred and twenty-five architectural projects which were either built or projected to be built in Rhode Island from 1840 to 1940. This will provide a unique opportunity to examine more closely the architectural heritage of the area as illustrated through the more personal side of the architectural field — the drawing. Upon closing in Providence, the exhibit will travel to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and National Academy of Design in New York (13 July - 15 Sept.) and then have its final showing in Washington, DC at the Octagon House, the American Institute of Architects Foundation.

— J.A.R.