

The Preservation Society of Newport County



**NEWPORT
MANSIONS**

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**Contact: Andrea Carneiro
(401) 847-1000 ext 131
acarneiro@NewportMansions.org**

NEWS

from The Preservation Society of Newport County

Season Opens on April 4

Newport Mansions Announce a New Tour for 2009: "The Breakers Revealed"

(Newport, RI) The Preservation Society of Newport County kicks off its 2009 season on Saturday, April 4 with an enlightening new tour of The Breakers—the historic Vanderbilt summer "cottage" in Newport, Rhode Island—that offers an updated interpretation of its place in American architectural, social and cultural history. Capping ten years of research into the house and the lives of the people who lived and worked there, the new tour will take visitors into several previously-unseen areas, and share stories about the Vanderbilt family and their servants that have never been heard before. Visitors will for the first time have an opportunity to see the house from multiple points of view, experiencing it the way different people did in its heyday...whether a family member, a servant, or a guest.

"This is a compelling new look at a legendary mansion," said Trudy Coxe, CEO and Executive Director of The Preservation Society of Newport County. "It brings The Breakers to life in a refreshing, exciting and inspirational way, even for people who have visited the house before."

The new interpretation also introduces audio tours to The Breakers for the first time, giving tour-goers more flexibility and control over their own experience, with a lightweight, state-of-the-art and easy-to-use handheld player. The audio tour will also help to reduce or eliminate waiting times during the busiest summer days. The Breakers is visited by more than a third of a million people every year.

In addition to The Breakers, Chateau-sur-Mer, The Elms, Marble House and Rosecliff will all open for daily touring on April 4. Green Animals Topiary Garden and Kingscote will each open for daily tours starting on May 9. Hunter House and Isaac Bell House will open on weekends only starting May 9, and then daily along with Chepstow starting June 20. For full season operating details on all properties, visit www.NewportMansions.org.

New Research Fuels Revamped Tour at The Breakers

Preservation Society researchers have spent nearly a decade reviewing archival documents, articles, photographs, and letters, and also interviewing people who lived and worked in the house and their descendants, to develop a more complete and intimate picture of life in The Breakers which is at the core of the new tour.

In 2003, the Preservation Society received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to convene a panel of leading scholars in architecture, history, servant life and museum learning theory to study The Breakers. They reviewed the extensive research and concluded that The

Breakers was ideally suited to serve as a window onto the complex and transformative period known as the "Gilded Age."

That same year, the Institute for Learning Innovation, a non-profit organization dedicated to evaluating American educational institutions and their program effectiveness, surveyed visitors at The Breakers to understand their impressions of the house, their perception of the Gilded Age, and what they valued most in their visit.

"What they found is that visitors focus first on the visual beauty of the building, followed by an interest in the family and servants, and that they believe the house is worthy of preservation because it captures the spirit of a bygone era that is part of America's heritage," said John R. Tschirch, Architectural Historian and Director of Academic Programs for the Preservation Society. "The scholars' emphasis on The Breakers as a cultural icon, and the visiting public's focus on the visual splendor of the building and its role as a time capsule of our heritage, have become the foundation of our new interpretation of the site."

The tour will also offer different perspectives on The Breakers, from architectural critics and writers to preservationists, so that visitors may be part of a dialogue and be prompted to start their own conversations. The visitor survey indicated their wish to continue their engagement with the house as lifelong learners, so the Preservation Society's website—www.NewportMansions.org—will have dedicated sections on The Breakers in order to share the extensive research and archival photographs, journals and other historic sources on which the new interpretation is based.

About The Preservation Society of Newport County and The Breakers

The Preservation Society of Newport County is a non-profit educational organization accredited by the American Association of Museums and dedicated to preserving and interpreting the area's historic architecture, landscapes and decorative arts. Its 11 historic properties—seven of them National Historic Landmarks—span more than 250 years of American architectural and social development.

The Breakers is the grandest of Newport's summer "cottages" and a symbol of the Vanderbilt family's social and financial preeminence in turn of the century America.

Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt (1794-1877) established the family fortune in steamships and later in the New York Central Railroad, which was a pivotal development in the industrial growth of the nation during the late 19th century. The Commodore's grandson, Cornelius Vanderbilt II, became Chairman and President of the New York Central Railroad system in 1885, and purchased a wooden house called The Breakers in Newport during that same year. In 1893, he commissioned architect Richard Morris Hunt to design a villa to replace the earlier wood-framed house, which was destroyed by fire the previous year. Hunt directed an international team of craftsmen and artisans to create a 70-room Italian Renaissance-style palazzo inspired by the 16th century palaces of Genoa and Turin. Allard and Sons of Paris assisted Hunt with furnishings and fixtures, Austro-American sculptor Karl Bitter designed relief sculpture, and Boston architect Ogden Codman decorated the family quarters.

The Vanderbilts had seven children. Their youngest daughter, Gladys, who married Count Laszlo Szechenyi of Hungary, inherited the house on her mother's death in 1934. An ardent supporter of The Preservation Society of Newport County, she opened The Breakers in 1948 to raise funds for the Society. In 1972, the Preservation Society purchased the house from her heirs. Today, the house is designated a National Historic Landmark.

For more information, visit www.NewportMansions.org.

