

# The Newport Dancers' Gazette

Newport Vintage Dance Week  
Editor: Katy Bishop, The Commonwealth Vintage Dancers

Volume X, Number 3  
Wednesday, 13 August 2003

## 1890'S BALL AT THE ASTOR'S BEECHWOOD

Wednesday, 580 Bellevue Avenue, Newport

### DIRECTIONS FROM PORTSMOUTH ABBEY :

Turn left onto Cory's Lane, drive to the intersection with route 114, turn right onto 114 and almost immediately, at the first light, turn left onto Hedley Street (there is a sign to Portsmouth Business Park). A little over ½ mi. down Hedley Street there is a stop sign, with a second stop sign almost immediately beyond it. Go straight at the first stop sign and turn right at the second onto route 138 south. Go approximately 4½ miles on Route 138; 138 intersects with 138A (Aquidneck Avenue) at a Dunkin Donuts, turn left onto 138A. Follow Aquidneck Avenue for about 2 miles, it eventually intersects with Memorial Blvd. Turn left onto Memorial Blvd., which bears right and past Newport's First Beach (on left). Follow Memorial Blvd. up the hill to the first major intersection with traffic lights (which is Bellevue Avenue). After turning left onto Bellevue Avenue, go approximately 1½ miles; *Beechwood* is on the left just after *Rosecliff* and just before *Marble House* (watch carefully as the sign can be difficult to spot). If you get to *Marble House*, turn around.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF BEECHWOOD AND THE ASTORS

Caroline Schermerhorn married William Backhouse Astor in 1853. She brought long lines of established social background to the Astor fortune and became the undisputed Queen of American Society. Caroline Astor insisted upon being called "The Mrs. Astor" by family and friends. With the help of a southern gentleman, Mr. Ward McAllister, she devised the famous "400," a list of 213 families and

individuals whose lineage could be traced back at least three generations.

*Beechwood* was built in 1851 for a southern cotton merchant named Daniel Parrish; the architects were Andrew Jackson Downing and Calvert Vaux. William Backhouse Astor, Jr., purchased the mansion in 1881, and it became the social center for New York Society for twenty-five years of the Gilded Age. William B., as his wife called him, was the grandson of John Jacob Astor, the German immigrant who made himself the richest man in America by investing in fur trading and real estate. Even in 1999, he was listed as the fourth-wealthiest American ever (Microsoft's Bill Gates was fifth).

The Astors hired architect Richard Morris Hunt to create an atmosphere at *Beechwood* that would be worthy of America's finest citizens. The family invested two million dollars into the renovations. Caroline Astor presided over countless social activities during the eight weeks of each year she visited *Beechwood*. The highlight of every summer season was Mrs. Astor's Summer Ball.

Mrs. Astor retired from social life in 1906. She lived quietly until her death in 1908.

After Mrs. Astor's death her son John Jacob Astor, IV, inherited *Beechwood*. In 1911 he remarried a much younger woman named Madeleine Talmadge Force; their ceremony was held in the ballroom of *Beechwood*. After the service the couple headed to Europe to escape the gossip of their union. Unfortunately, they were returning to New York on the RMS *Titanic*. Madeleine, who was five months pregnant, survived. Her husband, *Titanic*'s most wealthy passenger, did not.



-text courtesy of  
*The Astor's Beechwood Mansion*

SUMMER GARDEN TEA  
WEDNESDAY, MANOR HOUSE GAZEBO

Come have a snack, play croquet, or relax and chat with other Dance Week participants. Casual dress, modern or vintage, is welcomed.

WEDNESDAY DINNER

Dinner will be served ½ hour early on Wednesday evening to allow more time to prepare for and travel to the Ball at The Astors' Beechwood.

BATHING BEAUTY TEA  
THURSDAY, MANOR HOUSE GAZEBO  
& CAMPUS BEACH

Come sit and chat with other Dance Week participants, play a game of croquet, or visit the lovely stony beach adjacent to the lower field where tea is served. Casual dress, modern or vintage, or bathing costume of any period, is welcomed. No need to get wet if you don't want to, *really*.



LESLIES' LADIES' MAGAZINE, AUGUST 1875

PHOTOGRAPHS WANTED

We are always searching for interesting photographs of the various events at Newport and other CVD events for inclusion in publicity materials and for placement on our webpage. If you have any photos that you think would be appropriate, please give them to Katy or Ben Bishop or send them to the address on page 4, attn: CVD photos (and let us know if you wish to have them returned).



ASK MRS. ASTORBILT

*Dear Mrs. Astorbilt,*

When there is a lady with whom I very much want to dance, but I haven't managed to ask her over the course of a ball, how should I apologize to her?

*Punctilious Even in Disappointment*

*Dear Mr. Punctilious,*

Seeking out the lady and apologizing is a course fraught with peril. Sometimes a lady will be pleased that a gentleman was thinking about her and cared enough to seek her out to explain why he didn't dance with her. Another lady may be offended at the idea that you wanted to dance with her, but not quite enough actually to do so, or simply hurt at being reminded of how few dances she might have had that evening.

If you have put your name on a lady's dance card, you will of course seek her out for the specified dance. If you arranged with her before the ball to have a dance together, you must seek her out first thing before allowing your (or her) own dance card to fill up to formalize this arrangement. This, by the way, may be a good reason not to make casual arrangements as they create formal obligations. Ladies who regularly go to balls understand, or should understand, that unless a name is on a dance card or some similar arrangement has been made, there are no guarantees that one will have a dance partner for any given dance on any given evening. The unfortunate extension of this is that a lady (or, indeed, a gentleman) may be without a partner for many dances one night, and yet barely have a chance to sit down the next. There is neither rhyme nor reason to this, it just is. Because of this uncertainty, most ladies will prefer to not notice which men did not ask them to dance in a given evening, but to notice with pleasure the men who did ask.

If you really want to dance with a lady, the best way to demonstrate this is to ask her for a dance. If you do not have an opportunity to dance with her that night, you should make a special effort to seek her out the next time. If you do not intend to make that effort, then you should not draw attention to that fact by apologizing, but allow yourself to fade into that nebulous group of “men who didn’t ask”.

*Mrs. Astorbilt*



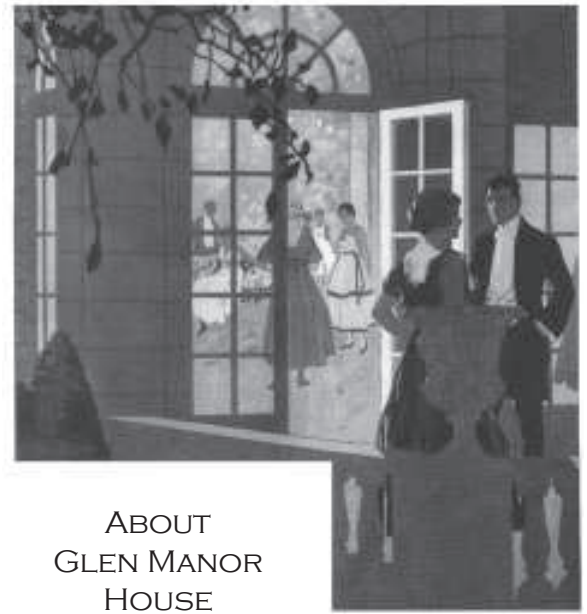
### FORMAL DINNER AND RAGTIME BALL

Thursday, Glen Manor House  
Coelho Drive, Portsmouth

“The Glen,” as it is referred to by locals, is the setting for Thursday’s formal dinner and Ragtime Ball.

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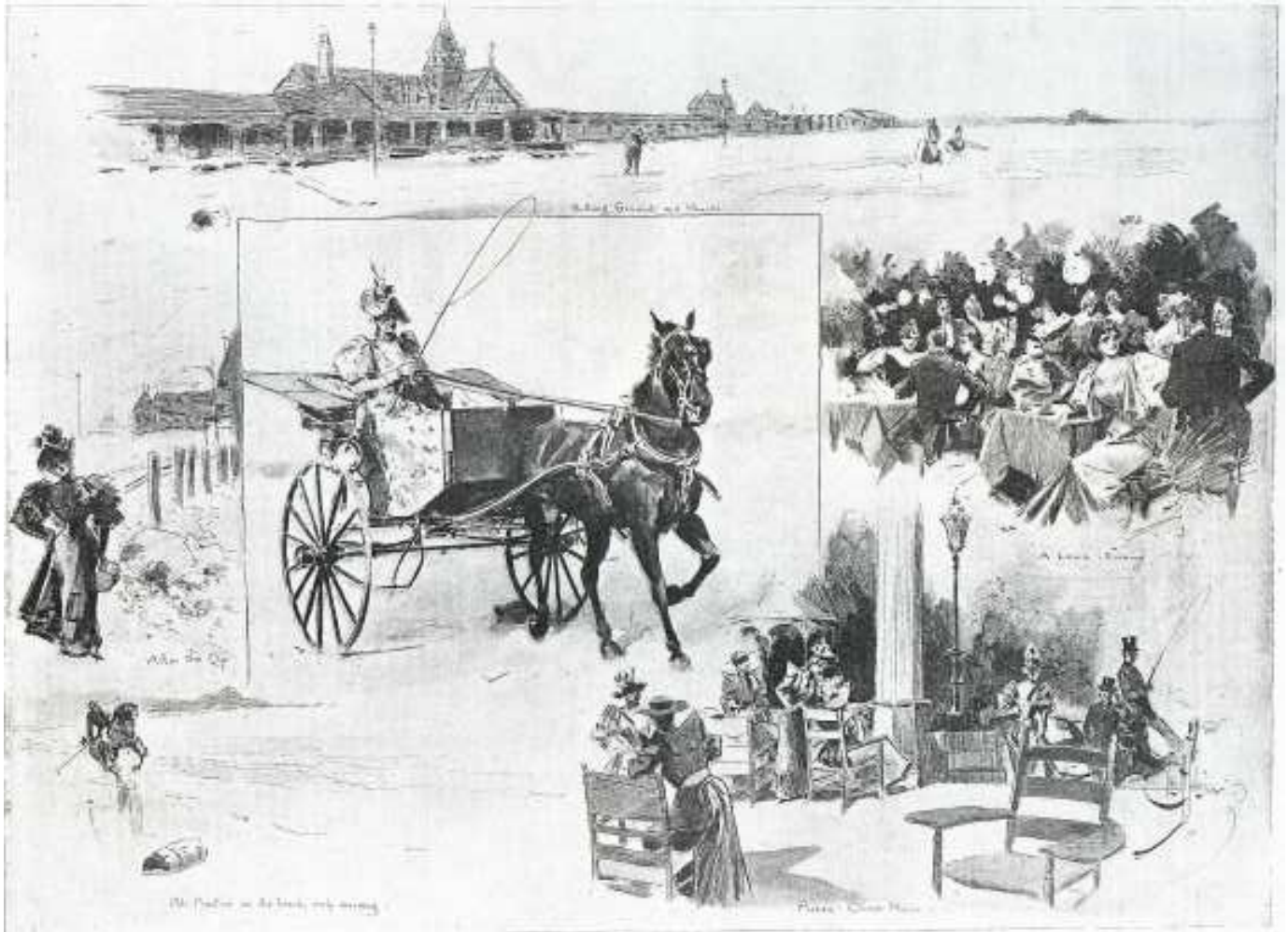
ABOUT  
GLEN MANOR  
HOUSE

In 1920 H. A. C. Taylor, a prominent farmer who also owned homes in New York and Newport planned to build a proper home on his farm. He hired architect John Russell Pope, designer of the Jefferson Memorial in Washington, DC. His French style design for the house was based on the Petit Trianon at *Versailles*, and was unique for the area. Although Mr. Taylor died before work began in 1921, his son Moses continued the work.

The Taylors moved into the house in 1923 and lived there for many years. Reginald, Moses’ son, sold it to the sisters of the Sacred Heart, who moved their Elmhurst School to the property in 1961. When the school closed in 1972, the town of Portsmouth purchased the property. Glen Manor House now provides an exquisite setting for special functions.

- excerpts from information provided  
by Glen Manor House





### LIFE AT NEWPORT

You may sit, if you choose, on the broad piazzas of the Ocean House facing Bellvue Avenue, and watch from there the stream of sumptuously appointed equipages sweeping by. You may even receive a visitor or two from one of their occupants, attended always by the solemnly alert footman, faultlessly attired. You may too, if you choose, dance in the pretty Casino, or sit perhaps, while looking on, *vis-à-vis* across the room to the most exclusive of Newport's own. And at all times when you choose you may find the ocean quite ready to receive you—the ocean that here rolls over a beach stretching miles away, a beach so hard that carriages drive over it every day. You may find many people there at bathing-hours, some well known, and if you chance upon the proper time—this changes from summer to summer—you may be tossed about by a breaker that is dealing, at the very same moment, quite as ruthlessly with another kind of swell, an advance from whom on land would set a world of social aspirants prostrate before him.

Newport society, indeed, constitutes a world of its own, revolving about its special axis (the axis changes from year to year, but is always governed by the inscrutable and immutable laws of fashion), and with a pole like the earth's, sometimes shifting a degree or two, but always directed toward one point—money. And this little world revolves undisturbed and undistracted by the other worlds outside, demanding, like the stars of Matthew Arnold's verses, neither love, amusement, nor sympathy from the things without them.

excerpts from *HARPER'S BAZAR*, 21 OCTOBER 1893

For Further information on the Dance Week  
or vintage dance please contact:  
The Commonwealth Vintage Dancers at:  
c/o Katy Bishop, P. O. Box 9, Nahant, MA 01908  
(781) 662-8344 or e-mail [Info@VintageDancers.org](mailto:Info@VintageDancers.org)  
visit them on the web at: [www.VintageDancers.org](http://www.VintageDancers.org)