



## HUNTER HOUSE

Hunter House (c. 1748) is one of the finest examples of Georgian Colonial architecture in Newport. Built on the harbor front at a time when the city was a bustling seaport in the British empire, the house was owned by wealthy merchants and overlooked the wharves that serviced their trading ships. These prosperous families furnished the house with decorative arts produced by expert craftsmen. Such a luxurious lifestyle depended on the labor of enslaved people of African descent. Recent research by the Preservation Society has identified at least 13 enslaved individuals who lived and worked at Hunter House. Today's Hunter House honors their perseverance and incalculable contributions to Newport's past.

## OWNERSHIP AND ARCHITECTURE

The north half of Hunter House was constructed between 1748 and 1754 by Jonathon Nichols Jr., a prosperous merchant and colonial deputy. Nichols lived here with his wife Mary Lawton, eight children, and at least seven enslaved people, who are identified in archival records as Phillis, Maud, Toby, Jo, Cambridge, Lucas and Dick. Following Nichols' death, the property was purchased in 1757 by another wealthy merchant and deputy governor, Joseph Wanton Jr. Wanton lived here with his first wife, Abigail Honyman, and second wife, Sarah Brenton. Altogether they raised seven children at Hunter House. Wanton also enslaved at least six individuals on the property, including Toby, London, Cuffe, James, Bacchus and Hamor.

During the American Revolution, Wanton fled from Newport due to his Loyalist sympathies. His house was used as the headquarters of Admiral de Ternay, commander of the French fleet, when French forces occupied Newport in 1780. After the war, the house was purchased by lawyer and statesman William Hunter. Hunter served as a U.S. Senator and President Andrew Jackson's charge d'affaires to Brazil. His duties often took him away from Newport, but his wife Mary Robinson and the couple's nine children spent a great deal of time at Hunter House. Over time, the family employed at least two free African-American women as domestic servants. The Hunters sold the house in the mid-1860s, and it passed through a series of owners until the mid-1940s.

Concerned that the fine interiors of the house would be purchased and removed from the building, Katherine Warren led a small group of supporters to initiate a preservation effort. They purchased the house and formed The Preservation Society of Newport County in 1945. Today, Hunter House is a National Historic Landmark devoted to exploring the complex history of Newport. Hunter House tours reveal what life in Newport was like for the home's many residents, including generations of prosperous merchants and enslaved people of African descent. Tours also examine Newport's important traditions of artisanship through the home's rich ensemble of decorative arts and architecture. The Hunter House collections include furniture by the Townsend-Goddard family, premier cabinetmakers of the colonial era who worked in the neighborhood of Hunter House. Newport pewter and paintings by Cosmo Alexander, Gilbert Stuart and Charles Bird King are also on display.