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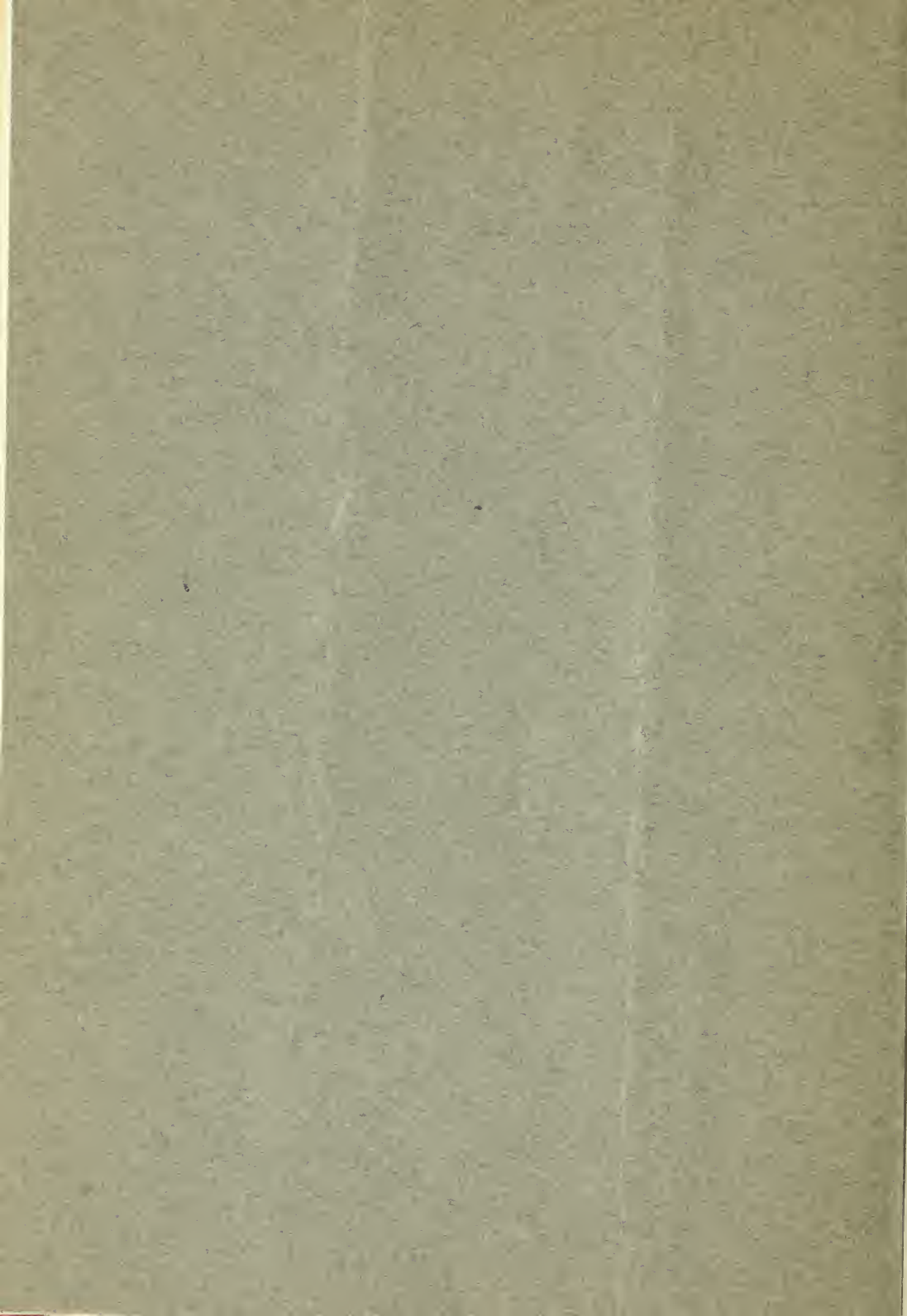


# DID THE NORSEMEN ERECT THE NEWPORT ROUND TOWER

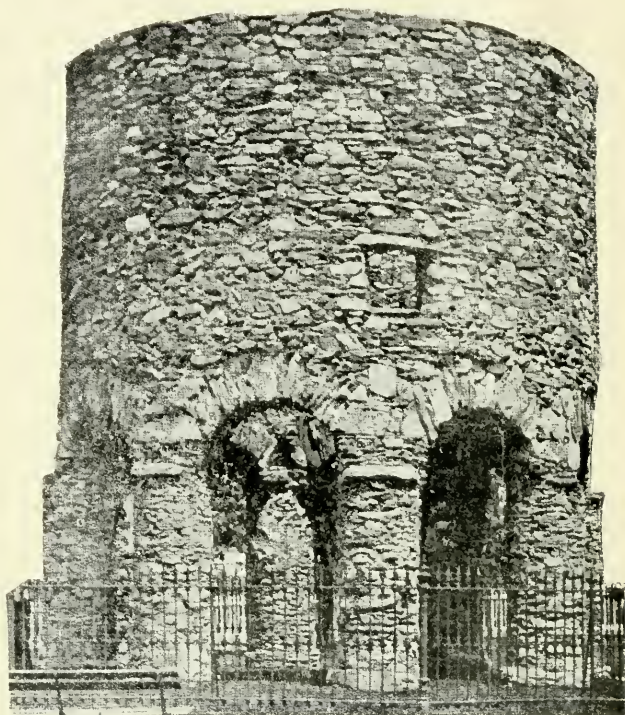
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BARTHINIUS L. WICK





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THE ROUND TOWER AT NEWPORT



## DID THE NORSEMEN ERECT THE NEWPORT ROUND TOWER

BY BARTHINIUS L. WICK

On the summit of the island of Rhode Island, in the quaint old town of Newport, stands an old relic of a former age, named, variously, the stone mill, the round tower, and the Norsemen's tower. What it was primarily intended for is not known, although it has been used at various times, it is said, for a powder house, a hay loft, and a storage place, all of which fail to disclose the purposes the original builder had in mind. The Governor Bull House, erected in 1639, as well as many other buildings and ruins of the seventeenth century are pointed out to the sightseeing tourist, but none so far has furnished any trustworthy evidence that the stone mill was built by any of the early English settlers. The Indians have made no claim to it; the mound builders, if they were a distinct race, would not have left behind just one building of such style when for generations they inhabited a greater part of the western continent.

Certain writers allege that the old tower must have been erected by Irish, Welsh, or Norse explorers, long prior to the entry of the Pilgrims on New England soil. The old stone ruin does not speak, and the builders and designers left no documentary evidence, so far as has been ascertained, to explain the mystery. Hence the correct account of the old ruin may always be the subject of endless discussions.

The Round Tower, as it has been known for more than a century, is a roofless, circular stone ruin about twenty-five feet high and about eighteen feet nine inches in diameter inside, and about twenty-three feet in diameter on the outside. It is supported on eight round, stone pillars, or arches, each three feet in diameter, constructed of the same kind of material as the

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remainder of the building. The arched openings are each twelve and one-half feet high from the ground. The tower is constructed of rubble stone and granite, of a material found along the seashore and its immediate vicinity. The mortar used in its construction has been carefully examined and found to contain a mixture of sea shells and small particles of slate, sand, and gravel, forming a kind of cement.<sup>1</sup>

The building is provided with two fire places, located about thirteen feet from the ground, just above the arches; the north fire place seems to run up nearly straight, while the south fire place curves slightly for some distance and then turns up with a slight inclination. Both flues open out on the face of the wall about nine or ten inches below the top, and each one is covered with a large stone, evidently to protect the under part of the roof. The flue of the north side does not appear to have been plastered, but the flue on the south side, it is claimed, shows evidences of some kind of plaster. There are openings in the wall in a few places. They may have been used as windows for admission of light or for purposes of observation. There are beam holes in the wall inside just above the columns, or arches, which must have been used for floors or stairways.<sup>2</sup>

A few writers have imagined that the structure was plastered on the outside; however, this is difficult to ascertain, as for many years the walls were covered with ivy, causing the sides to be damp, and thus the particles of plastering, if any had been put on, must have fallen off. This ivy was removed by order of the city authorities about the year 1879. In 1835 Dr. Webb made an examination of the pillars and found that these were set into the ground about four feet, which would make the foundation walls safe for a structure of this kind. Others believe that the building may have been much higher, but this contention is not borne out by the facts. It was, no doubt, covered with a wooden roof, and there may have been several wooden floors, making the tower to correspond to the old round towers still found in Waterford, Ireland, and other places.

Some writers on this subject have suggested that the fire places may have been enstalled at a later date. These fire places are built into the wall and are of the same kind of material, so

<sup>1</sup> Mason, G. C., *Sketches of Newport*, 1884, p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> *Am. Architect*, vol. vi, p. 111; Potter's *Am. Monthly*, vol. v, p. 753.

that they must have been erected at the same time the building was constructed.<sup>3</sup>

This tower, no doubt, was surrounded by a wooden stockade in order to keep the attacking natives at a safe distance. It may have been used at the same time also as a watch tower and lookout. It has been suggested that the builder must have had some knowledge of architecture in order to construct a circular building. However it is not a difficult task to erect such a building, yet it would indicate it had been constructed in accordance with some formulated plan although of rude construction throughout.

#### IS IT ARNOLD'S MILL

No one in particular laid any claim to this unroofed building, until the historical evidences were brought to light through the Sagas that the Norsemen had explored the New England region during the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> In the beginning of the nineteenth century the local historians, and others, began to set forth that this old ruin was a mill erected by Benedict Arnold, one of the governors of Rhode Island. This contention, after all, rested exclusively on a reference made to a stone mill in his will, dated December 20, 1677, part of it which reads as follows: "I give to my daughter, Hermia, wife of John Banister, eight acres with an old stone mill thereon standing and being now." There is also a reference in another part of that instrument "to his stone built mill." In another deed for the Jewish cemetery, dated 1677, it is stated: "A piece of land thirty feet long resting southwest upon the highway that leads from ye stone mill toward Benj. Griffins house." But a mere description in a deed or will does not by any means solve the question as to who was the original designer of buildings located upon such land.

Benedict Arnold was the son of William Arnold, born in Warwickshire, England, December 21, 1615. He emigrated with his father to the Providence Plantation in 1636. He did not remove to Newport till 1653, when he entered into the political turmoil of those times. He was one of the leaders of Gorton's settlement at Pawtuxet and assisted in uniting the Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. He was governor of the colony at

<sup>3</sup> *Magazine of Am. History*, vol. iii, p. 541; *Science*, vol. iv, p. 512; *Scribner's*, vol. xvii, p. 632.

<sup>4</sup> Rafn, C. C., *Antiquitates Americanae*, 1837.



the time of his death on June 20, 1678. His son was a member of the Assembly in 1695. His descendants were well known politically in New England up to the time of the Revolution, Benedict Arnold, the general and traitor, being a lineal descendant.

The site of the house where Arnold lived is known. The records show that he had constructed a woolen mill, but it was different from the stone mill. It is reasonable to expect that his numerous descendants would not have kept such a fact from public notice if such had been the case, that he had erected a stone windmill on pillars.

Peter Easton was a son of Nicholas Easton, who came from Southhampton to Massachusetts in 1634. The family came to Rhode Island four years later. Nicholas Easton was governor from 1650-1652, and his son John held the same office from 1690-1695. The Eastons and Arnolds were friendly. Both families were Quakers. Nicholas Easton had been a miller in England, and it was natural that one of the sons, Peter Easton, should erect one of the first wind mills on the island. As a reward for his services, Peter Easton was granted a tract of land along the southeastern coast of the island one mile long, still known as *Easton's Beach*.

Peter Easton kept a diary in which he jotted down everything of note which occurred in the locality. In it for 1663 he states: "This year was erected the first windmill." A severe storm blew down the Easton windmill on August 28, 1675, and this occurrence is also noted in his diary.

Lossing, writing prior to 1850, describes this mill as being a wooden structure. He also describes the stone mill as follows: "This structure is of unhewn stone laid in mortar made of gravel and oyster shell lime. It is a cylinder, resting upon eight round columns, twenty-three feet in diameter and twenty-four feet high. It was originally covered with stucco. It stood there when the white people first visited Rhode Island, and the Naragansett Indians had no tradition of its origin. There can be little doubt of its having been constructed by these northern navigators who made attempts at settlement in that vicinity."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lossing, B. J., *Field Book of the American Revolution*, 1850-1852.

If Arnold erected this mill it must have been after the storm and before his death. The Easton windmill seemed to belong to the town of Newport, for he received a grant of land in payment for it. Is it probable then that Arnold would erect a windmill on pillars at his own expense at this time in order to serve the public? Is it likely that he built chimneys in the wall, as are found in the tower, when in all buildings in New England at this time they were built on the outside? In the old buildings in Newport, hair was mixed with the lime and mortar; in the tower no such hair has been found. Is it likely that Arnold discarded all these old building methods and rules in his haste to supply the public with a stone built mill within a year or two of his death?

Dr. J. G. Palfrey in his *History of New England*, says regarding the Arnold mill: "Without doubt it is extraordinary that no record hints of the erection of so singular an edifice by early English inhabitants of Rhode Island. But it would be much more strange that the first English settlers should not have mentioned the fact."

It is highly improbable that Governor Arnold, of a practical turn of mind, would erect a stone mill on pillars in a timber country at a time when he was so deeply engrossed with colonial charters and local politics, as he was up to the very time of his death. If Arnold had constructed such a building then there would have remained some incidents other than a will simply describing the land which he owned and which he sought to convey in accordance with legal methods of procedure.

In a thriving settlement like Newport, far removed from running streams and before the age of steam, the settlers soon discovered that it was a difficult and arduous task to grind their grain by hand. It is therefore not surprising to find that Easton was amply rewarded by his townsmen on account of his practical turn of mind in the erection of his windmill. It was looked upon by the inhabitants as an enterprising feat, and the circumstances have been duly recorded. Why should the erection of Arnold's windmill be left in doubt if he had served his fellow citizens in such a practical manner? Would not such incident have become a matter of general knowledge?

That Nicholas Easton erected a dwelling house in Newport in 1638 is well known. Henry Bull, born in Wales in 1609, came

to Rhode Island in 1638. He was governor for 1685-89, passing away in 1693, and was a fellow-worker and friend of Arnold. The Bull dwelling house, still standing, is pointed out, as well as the old churches, halls, and public buildings. In fact all the circumstances relating to Arnold and his contemporaries are well known in the community where they lived.

When, from the contemporaries of Arnold, not a word is found to substantiate the theory that he should have built it, there remains no proof for such contention. He may have used this ruin for a mill and storage room, belonging to him by right of purchase of the ground, and it may have been called Arnold's mill, but all this by itself is not sufficient to support the theory that Arnold erected this tower as a windmill. There is no positive evidence to this effect.

Samuel Freebody, a resident of Newport, was one of a committee appointed to erect a watch tower in this old ruin as late as 1762. Even as late as fifty years ago, an architect, a son of Delancy Kane, an old resident of the town, suggested that the tower be removed from the present location in order to beautify the Touro Park. This too plainly indicates that the old residents of the town manifested no interest in it, and no doubt believed that it was some old Indian fortress or storehouse.

The local historians assert that Joseph Mumford, who died in the first part of nineteenth century, nearly eighty years of age, had played in the tower as a boy; that he had found powder in it, and furthermore, his father, born about 1699, had used the tower as a hay loft for a time.<sup>6</sup> This incident does not prove for what purpose the ruin was built. That it was strongly constructed is evident from the fact that when Newport was besieged by the British during the Revolution more than five hundred dwelling houses were destroyed, but the tower withstood all these terrific explosions which nearly wrecked the town.

George G. Chaney, a local historian, from a careful research, in his *Early Recollections of Newport*, dwells upon the probable history of the tower, and speaks of it as being a very old ruin, and that the building must have been erected many centuries before the Pilgrims arrived upon New England soil. He says; "The very style and class of the structure precludes the idea

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<sup>6</sup> Hammett, C. E., Jr., *Controversy Touching the Stone Mill*, 1851.



that it could have erected on a barren waste, merely to grind Indian corn."

A number of writers have sought to bring out information in regard to what is known as the "Chesterton Mill," erected in the County of Warwick, England, about the year 1632. The Chesterton Mill is described as being thirty-five feet high and twenty-three feet wide at the base; the columns being about four and one-half feet each way. It is built on six square columns.

The two towers differ as follows: "The Newport Tower has eight pillars, while the Chesterton Mill has six; the Newport Tower has the outer face or columns vertical, projecting over the pillars, while in the English structure there is no such projection and the pillars are square. In the Newport ruin the stone is a rough cobble or rubble stone, while the material used in the English structure is that of dressed stone."<sup>7</sup>

The English structure is known to have been built by Edward Payton, and designed, it is said, by that well known architect, Inigo Jones, a friend of Pembroke, who had studied architecture in Denmark and Italy. Jones had designed several buildings in Denmark, such as the palaces of Rosenberg, Fredricksborg, and other structures. In 1605 he returned to his native country, England, when he became a person of much favor in court circles. Jones designed the great banquet hall at Whitehall and several of the buildings erected at Oxford, all of which testify to "a love of classical architecture with a blending of the Gothic elements with the Italian style."

It is doubtful, then, if the practical Arnold, coming to New England in the pioneer days of these struggling colonies, and from an early age engaging in political contests, would have centered his mind on the works of one of the greatest architects in England. It is improbable that the plans of a mere partisan royalist would have been adopted in this most Protestant colony in all America. The real truth of the matter is that Arnold and the men of his time heard little of and cared less for the style of architecture of Inigo Jones, and certainly would not care to perpetuate his name in New England. Any one who will make a personal investigation of the two round towers will find that

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<sup>7</sup> See *Penny Magazine*, 1836, p. 480; *History of Warwickshire*, vol. i, p. 92.

the English structure is built in accordance with types then in vogue, while the Newport tower was never intended for a windmill, but for a stronghold, or possibly for a church. Those who contend that Arnold was the designer and builder of this tower have no positive evidence to offer. If he had erected such a structure that fact would have been a matter of common knowledge for the reason that he was a well known person, and his contemporaries would have left some record to prove this fact. As it is, there is no direct testimony to show that Arnold or any one else ever erected the tower since the time that the English set foot on New England soil.

#### INDIAN RUINS

If the tower was not erected by the English settlers could it be a discarded relic of the aborigines? William Coddington, for a time governor of Rhode Island, a prominent politician and friend of the Indians, and a companion of Arnold, inquired from the Indians as to the history of the ruin, and the Red Men denied having any knowledge of how, or by whom, the tower was erected. Other answers obtained from the natives were to the effect that "giants had built the tower in the long ago."

There is a legend concerning this tower which might serve as a link in the evidence sought to be introduced: "A seer among the Naragansetts had a vision in which he foresaw that when the last remnant of the Newport tower had fallen, and not one stone left on one another, the Indian race would vanish from the continent."<sup>8</sup>

While we do not want to be understood as basing the contention merely upon legendary stories of what the natives "heard tell," still this may be said, that such a legend would not grow up about such a building, after the English settlement was founded and after the Indians had been removed from the very region about which the legend is concerned.

We have no proof that Eskimos ever resided in this region. It is the general opinion of archaeologists, that the mound builders were Indians, such as the Norsemen met and such as Columbus and others later found. It may be the tribes the Norsemen saw face to face were not the same that the English speaking explorers later encountered, but it is now generally

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<sup>8</sup> Skinner, C. M., *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*.

believed that they were kindred in race and culture to the old races. In the light then of the most recent and authoritative research, the Newport tower was never erected by the native races.

While mounds and ruins in Mexico have of late disclosed much valuable information in the study of the North American Indians, still in all the discoveries so far made none has any circular stone tower. The dome-shaped bark wigwam of the Algonkians, the earth lodges of the Mandans, and the adobe cliff-dwellings of the Pueblos represent the variety as well as the extent of the architecture of the aborigines of North America.<sup>9</sup>

#### IRISH AND OTHER TOWERS

It has been intimated that the Newport tower is similar to one found on the island of St. Thomas, which is supposed to be very old. As to this I am not familiar, although it might have been built by shipwrecked sailors in an early day as a fortification against hostile natives of the island.

An old windmill found at Vandreuil, in the Province of Quebec, Canada, has also been referred to, as a similar structure to the one found at Newport. I have made an examination of this structure but can discover no resemblance to the Newport ruin. The history of the Canadian windmill is well known. It was erected by the French about 1688. In an early day there were many of these mills built by the lords of the respective manors, for the use of the settlers in grinding their wheat. Nearly all of these have long since disappeared. The style of architecture is not that of the Newport stone mill, but that in use in Europe at the time of the settlement of Canada by the French.

A suggestion has also been made, in order to account for this ruin by pretext of authority, that it could have been erected by the early Irish explorers who might have settled here some time long prior to the coming of the Pilgrims. This intimation has found much support for the reason that Ireland is the home of the round towers, where to this day there can be found nearly one hundred of these ruins, many of which are in a fair state of preservation.

The Irish round tower or bell tower rises from 30 to 130 feet in height, having a diameter of from twelve to twenty-

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<sup>9</sup> See Reports of J. W. Powell, *Bureau of Am. Ethnology*.



five feet. The Irish towers are slender and taper from the base upward, and are round with a conical top. On the early towers no mortar is used, but a sort of whitewash was used on the outer walls. A kind of stucco is also used on towers erected at a later date.

There is found a winding stairway on the inside of the tower, with small openings at various places, which were no doubt used to watch the invaders and as places from which to hurl missiles at the attacking bands who might gather below seeking admission. The openings were placed about ten to fifteen feet from the ground, and entrance gained by some sort of a drop ladder, or trap door.

A variety of theories have been advanced in regard to the period of these towers, and the purposes they were designed to serve. The opinion of antiquarians has been greatly divided. It is thought that the towers were constructed during the ninth and tenth centuries. They are supposed to have served as strongholds, to which places in time of danger the inhabitants fled. Dr. George Petrie, an authority on the Irish round towers, is of the opinion that these towers were erected solely for religious purposes, as they are generally found in close proximity to the churches.

It must be borne in mind that the Norsemen and Danes founded the first cities and towns in Ireland, and that the ruins of the Irish bell towers are most numerous in the counties settled by the Vikings. It has been found on investigation that while the churches which were located near the bell towers are in ruins, the towers are in a fair state of preservation. For this reason it is supposed that the bell towers were erected at a much later time than the churches. As to the truth of this assertion this may be said, that the British soldiers who were sent to Ireland to crush the Catholic church may have demolished the church edifices and left the towers untouched.<sup>10</sup>

Wilson is of the opinion that the towers are of a much later date than the churches. He also is of the opinion that the towers were erected at different dates, as can be seen from the style of architecture and mode of building.

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<sup>10</sup> See Stokes, Margaret, *Early Christian Art in Ireland*; Wilson, Daniel, *The Archæology and Pre-historic Annals of Scotland*, 1851; Petrie, George, *Ecccl. Architecture of Ireland*.



THE ROUND TOWER AT MOUSA





It is immaterial whether or not the Norse and Danish settlers erected any of the Irish bell towers. This is true, that the Norse invaders had seen such towers long before they settled in Iceland and Greenland. They were familiar with this style of architecture for a long time prior to the Vinland discoveries, and it would not have been difficult to have erected a similar tower in Vinland whether intended as a religious monument or for the purposes of defense.

Ruins are still found of round towers on the coast of the Isle of Man, the Orkneys, Hebrides, and Shetland Islands, as well as along the eastern coast of Scotland, where the Norsemen and Danes resided during the Viking age. In many of these places these ruins or forts have been variously designated as Norse and Dane borgs, or bruchs and were no doubt used by these sojourners in the country for defensive purposes in case of sudden attacks. Whether these round towers, variously located, were erected by Piets or Celts, or by later Scandinavian invaders cannot be ascertained for a certainty.<sup>11</sup>

On the small island of Mousa, one of the Shetland Islands, can still be seen a round tower which has much in common with the Newport ruin. It is known as the Mousa round tower, and described as follows: "The borg is circular, and fifty feet in diameter and built of uncut, average size cobble stone, without cement or lime. This plain round building is about forty-two feet high and at some distance from the ground, the circular walls bulge out, and again at the top the diameter of the structure becomes less. This form of construction must have been designed for the sole purpose of making it more difficult to scale the outside walls. The opening is close to the ground and can easily be defended. The tower is erected of two walls, an inner and outer wall, each about five feet thick, enclosing a space of about ten feet, thus making the diameter of the open space on the inside some twenty-one feet. There is a stone stairway on the inside which leads to the top, and it seems that the tower was divided into seven stories in such manner as to make the ceiling of one room the floor of the next above. There are openings in the inner wall at various places for the admission of light and

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<sup>11</sup> Worsaae, J. J., *Minder om Danske og Normænd*, p. 294; Overland, *Norges Hist.*, vol. i, p. 88.

air. There is no indication that the entire tower had any roof, except the apartment which was covered by large stone slabs.”<sup>12</sup>

It is true that the construction of the two towers are not identical, still from the standpoint of architecture they have much in common. They are both built of cobble stone, circular in shape, and must have been erected as places of defense, and the Mousa tower was so used by the Norsemen, as recorded in the Sagas. Both towers are erected not only as fortresses but also for the purpose of housing for a longer or shorter period of time a number of people. The erection of the Newport tower on pillars saved considerable material, and would answer the same purpose, and the doing away with an inside wall, as found in the Mousa tower, also saved considerable stone and labor. A thick outside wall, as found in the Newport tower, would be sufficiently strong against attacks by the Indians, who possessed such crude implements of warfare as arrows and slings. It is probable that the Newport tower was provided with wooden floors and wooden stairways and the entire structure covered by a conical wooden roof, the structure then being surrounded by a wooden stockade, thus keeping the natives at a safe distance from the fortress proper. Such a style of building would be easily built in a timber country like New England, but it would be costly on treeless islands in the North Sea where stone was plentiful and timber scarce.

Borgs are of Scandinavian origin, and many were constructed similar to the round tower of Mousa. This tower may have been erected by an invading army of Norsemen on an island where it would be surrounded by ships, and would be a means of defense as well as of refuge in time of attack by the natives. These structures were of varied form or plan. They were square, round and octagonal, and were built of timber as well as of unhewn stone, and were generally erected in some secluded spot on some cliff or headland, which on account of natural conditions would be safe and easy to defend in case of attack.

That the Norsemen were familiar with the style and type of architecture known as borgs or burgs we cite from the Sagas:

“King Burislaf sent an invitation to the Jarl of Fjon, that he would give him a riki in his land if he should settle there and

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<sup>12</sup> Hibbard, George, *The Shetland Islands*; Laurensen, A. D., *Personal Letters*, 1909.

defend his land. He quickly had a large strong sea borg made, since called Jomsborg. He also had a harbor made within the borg in which 300 long ships could lie at the same time. The entrance to the harbor was constructed with great skill. It was like a gate with a large stone arch above and shut with iron doors locked from inside the harbor. Upon the arch was built a strong tower in which were catapults. Part of the borg stood out in the water and the borgs built thus are called sea borgs.”<sup>13</sup>

It is further stated: “The Danish Kings had a large earldom. They first built Jomsborg and it became a very strong borg. When Magnus came to Wendland he attacked Jomsborg and took the fort, killed many people and set fire to the borg.”<sup>14</sup>

The Mousa tower is still standing in a fair state of preservation and while no positive evidence remains that it was built by the Norsemen, it is frequently referred to in the Sagas. It is stated that a well known Viking, Bjorn Brynjolfson, came to the Mousa tower during the reign of Harold Fairhair, with his sweetheart, Thora Roaldsdatter, and sought shelter in the tower. He had been declared an outlaw in Norway and a prize had been set upon his head, hence it became necessary to be in close proximity to a strong fortress in case of attack. Here he defended himself for a time and fled to Iceland the following spring. Nearly two centuries later another noted Viking, Erlend Junge, fled with Jarl Harold, Maddason’s mother, “a woman known as much in her day for her frivolity as for her beauty.” This couple took up temporary quarters in the round tower as a place which could provide the doughty wooer and his company a place of security in case of attack. Harold was not slow in pursuing Erlend with his ships to attack the borg, if possible, and attempt to starve the clopers if he failed, for the Sagas relate that the borg was impregnable.<sup>15</sup>

These bits of Saga literature show that the Mousa tower, whatever it may have originally been erected for, was used by the Norsemen prior to, and during the time of the Vinland voyages, as a place of refuge and as a fortress, and its location and its style of architecture must have been known to Vinland voyagers. It would have required no special skill and no great

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<sup>13</sup> *Jomsvikinga Saga*, chapter 24.

<sup>14</sup> *Magnus, den Godes Saga*.

<sup>15</sup> Cited by Worsaae, p. 298.



dexterity to have erected in this western world without any tools a structure similar to the Mousa tower and for the same purpose for which that was used by the Norsemen. The Sagas also refer to another round tower built by Ragnvald [Reginald] in Waterford, Ireland, about the year 1003, and still known as Reginald's Tower. It was erected as a stronghold, was used as a mint, was occupied for a time by the last Danish King as a residence, and was later used as a jail and for various other purposes till 1819 when it was repaired and fixed up for a museum. This round tower was originally intended for a place of defense and was thus used by the Norsemen and others after them. It was built at the very time that the Vinland voyages were begun and it is well known that both Leif and Thorfin and their crews were familiar with the Norse settlement in Waterford and perhaps personally acquainted with the King himself. It takes no stretch of imagination to connect Ragnvald's occupancy of that part of Ireland with the Vinland colony and the opposition of the natives to the white settlers.

#### THE VINLAND VOYAGES

No one doubts that Bjarne Herjulfson first saw the coast of North America about the year 986, and that Leif, the son of Eric the Red, in the early autumn of 1000 with a crew of thirty-five men set sail for the unknown region discovered by Bjarne some fourteen years previously. During the following spring Leif and his crew returned to Greenland with a cargo of timber. In the following year Leif's brother, Thorwald, set sail for the identical region in Leif's ship. Here he spent two winters fighting, but was killed by the natives, the crew returning to Greenland in 1004. The following spring a third brother, Thorstein, set sail in the same ship with Gurid, his wife, and a crew of thirty-five men. This journey seems to have been a dangerous one, for the ship was driven about by the angry waves of the Atlantic all summer, and never reached Leif's booths. Thorstein died on this journey and Gurid assumed command of the ships, returning to Leif's home in Ericsfjord in the autumn.

The most interesting and romantic of the Vinland voyages is that related about Thorfin Karlsefne and Snorre, both Icelanders of fortune and well born, who came to Greenland with large crews in two ships in the summer of 1006. They were well re-

ceived by the family of Eric the Red at Brattalid. Thorfin soon fell in love and married the beautiful widow Gurid, the following winter. Either persuaded by his adventurous bride, or from a pure love of conquest, Thorfin set sail for Vinland in the spring of 1007 with a crew of one hundred and sixty, including women, and having at least three or four ships. One Saga states that the number was sixty, while the other says the number who were on this trip was one hundred and sixty. This voyage was made for the sole purpose of making a permanent settlement. Among the persons mentioned who came on this trip were Eric's son, Thorwald, and his sister Freydis, as well as a number of noted Vikings who may have had command of the various ships. The ships landed safely at Leif's booths; and other booths were erected in order to give the respective crews plenty of room. The Saga mentions that the settlers came in contact with the natives, whom they called Skraelings, all of whom were hostile, so that the place or borg had to be carefully fortified. A number of Norsemen were killed by the natives, while a great many natives were killed while attacking the fortified camp of the whites. The settlers after waging a long drawn out contest against the natives were compelled on account of these persistent hostilities to return to Greenland in 1010, bringing back a cargo of timber and furs.

Another futile attempt was made to settle Vinland the following year when Freydis, a daughter of Eric the Red, with Thorwald, her husband, and a crew of thirty on one ship, and a crew of thirty-five on another, including women, set out for Vinland. Here a quarrel arose as to which party should have the booths which Leif always freely loaned to any of the voyagers, but of which property he refused to dispose. This unfortunate enterprise ended in the murder of most of the crews and of the return to Greenland the following year of the wicked Freydis and of her weak and vacillating husband.

Two of the Sagas refer to the Vinland discoveries, the Eric Saga and the Thorfin Saga, and while they do not agree in detail, it is permissible to say that one corroborates the other. These stories were related by different individuals and at different times, and while one thing may have impressed itself upon one person, some other incident may have been uppermost in the mind of another narrator. The Sagas which refer to the struggle in Great Britain and Ireland, in Iceland and Greenland, have

been verified by other historical sources, and if we can assume that they are true when they refer to other events, and other countries, and are corroborated by other testimony, these Sagas then should be of equal weight when they refer to the voyages made to Vinland. It is Humboldt who says of the Sagas that "here we stand on historical ground."

The book containing the Eric the Red Saga was copied by two priests, and it is agreed by historians that it must have been copied about the year 1387. These copies were compiled from older manuscripts which have been lost, or have disappeared.

The Thorfin Saga is no doubt copied from a number of Sagas written by several different persons. The Hauksbok was written by Hauk Erlendson between 1305 and 1334, the year of his death. It was translated by Rafn in *Gronlands Historiske Mindesmarker*. The contention among historians has been which one was the most authentic, and upon this point scholars have been divided.

Besides these Sagas, we have other evidence referring to the Vinland voyages, such as Adam of Bremen, the German historian, who received his information from Swend Estridson, the king of Denmark, as well as other persons with whom he conversed in obtaining information, in reference to the work of the church in the far north.

Thormod Torfaeus, the Icelandic scholar, was one of the first writers to apply Icelandic literature to the study of Scandinavian antiquities and history. His writings concerning Vinland are of interest and should be authentic.<sup>16</sup> Thus the story of the Vinland voyages has been confirmed and verified by many subsequent writers.

In the Icelandic Archives it is mentioned for the year 1125, that Eric Upsi, also known as Eric Gnuþsson, a native of Iceland, was appointed bishop of Greenland and Vinland. The last papal document which refers to Vinland is of the year 1448, where it states that "the Greenland colonies were destroyed by the heathens about thirty years before."

As late as the year 1347 in the Skaholt Annals, the following notice is found with reference to Vinland: "A ship came at this time from Greenland which had sailed to Markland which had on board a crew of eighteen men." In regard to this reference to the Vinland colony Reeves suggests that "this ship had no doubt

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<sup>16</sup> *Hist. Vinlandiae Antiquae*, Copenhagen, 1705.



drifted to Iceland and undoubtedly was engaged in trade on Vinland and hence the mention in the annals of Iceland was only incidental showing that up to that time at least trade was carried on between Greenland and Vinland."<sup>17</sup>

Calamities came thick and fast upon these island republics. About the middle of the fourteenth century the Black Death raged all over Europe to such an extent that one-third of the entire population of Norway and Iceland was swept away in a comparatively short time. The historians of the time relate that ships whose crews had perished to the last man were often seen drifting on the shores. While there is some dispute as to what extent the plague visited Greenland, it at least stopped all communications with the mother country for years afterwards.

At this time sprang into prominence the greatest shipping trust ever known in Europe, to-wit: the Hanseatic League, which controlled all trade and to a certain extent influenced the policies of ministries and kings as well. Following this exclusive colonial trade came the short-sighted Queen Margaret favoring a royal monopoly to such an extent that no colony, or private companies, could carry on trade without a royal charter. Fiske well says that "Margaret made her precious contribution to the innumerable swarm of instances that show with what little wisdom the world is ruled."<sup>17a</sup>

It is not surprising then that after the abandonment of the Greenland colonies, and after Norway lost its merchant fleet, and Iceland was left to fight out its internal strifes, Vinland should be lost sight of, and that the new world had again to be re-discovered.

It has been frequently asserted that the Vinland voyagers could not have taken possession of the country in such large numbers and left no records behind, and that if they had imported cattle as related in the Sagas, then Columbus and his followers would have found wild cattle in the country when they came some five centuries later. In reply to these questions I would say, that the Sagas refer frequently to the fact that the settlers were in want and undoubtedly the cattle imported were not many, and if the settlers abandoned the colony they certainly

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<sup>17</sup> Reeves, W. M., *Finding of Vinland the Good*, 1890, p. 80; see *Huniskrinkla*, by Laing, vol. i, p. 147.

<sup>17a</sup> Fiske, John, *Dis. of North America*, vol. i, p. 225.

would have butchered the cattle for food before departing. There is no contention that Vinland was thickly settled, nor that the settlements continued for any great length of time. Furthermore, it is not probable that many runic inscriptions would be found some five hundred years later. It is true that many monuments and runic inscriptions have been discovered in Great Britain, Ireland, and Greenland, but here Norsemen came in large numbers and in many localities founded permanent settlements, and among civilized races of people who would not likely destroy such inscriptions. The aborigines, on the other hand, while to a certain extent familiar with picture writing feared the armor clad white settlers, and most likely would in every way possible destroy every vestige which these men had left behind.

It has been frequently pointed out that the only real evidence so far found of the Norsemen's occupancy of the American continent was the runic inscription found on a stone in 1824 in Baffin's Bay, at seventy-three degrees north latitude, in a region supposed up to that time to have been unexplored by European races. This inscription supposed to be from about the year 1135 reads as follows: "Erling Sighvaten and Bjarne Thordhardson and Endrid Oddson raised these marks and cleared ground on Saturday before Ascension Week."

If the Norsemen had the audacity to sail north along the western coast of Greenland to such a distance, there is no reason why in their fast sailing keel ships, they could not with ease and safety reach the coast of New England after this region had once been discovered.<sup>18</sup>

Greenland, as is well known, was settled for fully three hundred years, and had in the east settlement one hundred and ninety farms and in the west settlement ninety farms and a population variously estimated from six to eight thousand. Furthermore, at least for several centuries there were no hostile natives to fight as in Vinland. Hence in Greenland ruins of churches, old implements, graves, etc., have been found.

Just where Vinland was located it is difficult to say. The historians of a half century ago were of the opinion that Leif's booths must have been located somewhere from New York to Maine. Later investigators, especially Gustav Storm, are of the opinion that Vinland must be looked for in Newfoundland

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<sup>18</sup> Slafter, E. F., *Voyages of the Norsemen to America*, Boston, 1877.

or Nova Scotia. No evidence of any kind has been produced to substantiate such a theory. Those who uphold the Storm theory must disregard altogether the Eric Saga. Fiske, the historian, states that Vinland must be located between Nova Scotia and Point Judith. One of the strongest points as to the location of the Vinland colony is the fact that on the shortest day of the year the sun came up at about 7:30 in the morning and set about 4:30 in the afternoon. This would point to a locality of about forty-one degrees north latitude. The meaning of certain words over which there is more or less contention has been fully discussed by several writers.<sup>19</sup>

If Vinland was located in Newfoundland, instead of in New England, there would be no manifest surprise to the sojourners from Greenland or Iceland as to the length of the days, or as to any mention made of a mild winter climate. For this very reason mention is made, that this was a phenomenon with which these Norsemen were not familiar. Thousands of Norsemen who have since that time come to the middle west have frequently written home to their kindred telling of these uncommon and peculiar things, such as the absence of twilight, the use of lamps during the summer, and the length of the day during the winter holidays, all such natural phenomena being absent in the Fatherland. Such occurrences would not appear strange to a foreigner coming from the same latitude in Europe, but it does seem strange to one coming from a country located forty degrees further north.

The discovery of wild grapes is mentioned in both Sagas as well as by Adam of Bremen. This would prove that Vinland was located much farther south than the place Storm indicates. Storm has attempted to prove that wild grapes grow in Nova Scotia, and to prove his contention that the Vinland colony was located there has cited certain facts of the growth of wild grapes in that country.

The writer has visited not only New England but traveled extensively in Nova Scotia and has made inquiries and searched the historical records for such information, but has found no such evidence.

Along the south shore of the Bay of Fundy the French planted orchards and erected dykes and may have planted

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<sup>19</sup> Hosford, E. N., *Dis. of America by the Norsemen*; Anderson, R. B., *Hvor laa Vinland*.

grapes, but if any wild grapes have been found in Nova Scotia it must be a wild variety from such as the French settlers planted many centuries after the Vinland voyages were abandoned. Another item of importance is the fact referred to, of the wheat which grew wild in the country, and which no doubt was the Indian corn and not wheat. Corn does not grow along the sea coast further north than the state of Massachusetts, while it does mature at a much higher latitude in the Mississippi valley.

A number of writers on this subject have attempted to describe the exact location of Vinland by comparing the coasts, bays, rivers, and head-lands described in the Sagas. While the writer has made extended journeys along the New England coast, Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, Newfoundland, and surrounding islands, having in mind the main physical features of the countries mentioned in the Sagas, he does not wish, however, to be understood that he has located any one point which fits the description of the places mentioned.<sup>20</sup> Any one locality described in a general way would apply to a dozen other similar localities. One can find extraordinary tides, dangerous coast lines, excellent fishing places, timbered islands, and many rivers along this stretch of country, but no one could exactly describe one locality from the meager descriptions given in the Sagas. However, this is certainly true, that the descriptions of the Sagas in noting the general contour of the land apply much more to places within the United States, than they do to other regions.

The inscription on the boulder found in Tautuon river near the village of Dighton, have not been fully deciphered as runic characters. Neither have the marks been accepted as Indian picture writing. The Indians have a legend of the arrival of the white men in a bird, which no doubt was intended to be a ship. From this issued thunder and lightning. A battle took place, the visitors writing the story on the Dighton rock. The Norsemen were not familiar with firearms at the time of the discovery of America, and hence the Indians must have used the old myth about the ship, adding to it just what occurred when the whites came five centuries later.

Inscriptions have also been found on rocks at Tiverton, Portsmouth, and Bristol Ferry, Rhode Island, but so far no one has undertaken to decipher these inscriptions. In the light of recent

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<sup>20</sup> Fiske, John, *Dis. of America*, vol. i, p. 185.



discovery these marks are unexplained for the reason that the characters have been worn off so that it is impossible correctly to decipher the runic characters, if such they are.

Historians also claim that the Vinland colony was the mythical lost city of Norumbega.<sup>21</sup> We have no authentic evidence of any such a city. The name is rather given by the early explorers to different rivers, or localities, along the eastern coasts of North America from Florida to Cape Breton.

The Newport Round Tower, then, stands as a relic of some builder and designer of whom we know nothing. Was it built by the Norsemen? If so, for what purpose was it built? Was it the dream of Bishop Upsi to erect here on the high hill, overlooking the beautiful bay, a place of worship, and are these ruins the vestiges of what he erected with his own hands and by his own efforts? If so, did the Indians come to attend services, or did they merely stand on the outside and gaze with awe at the pictures and crucifixes which must have adorned this first Christian church planted on the western continent. If it was erected at all for a church, it must have been constructed through the efforts of the enthusiastic Bishop Eric, who from the records for the year 1121 appears to have set sail in search of Vinland. He may have perished on this hazardous trip, for no record is left of what he accomplished, or of his death. Another bishop was appointed in his place some three years later. In 1059 an Irish priest was appointed who also went in search for Vinland, but who was murdered by the natives. Was Eric Upsi killed by the natives, or did he and his devout followers, perish amid the waves of the mighty Atlantic? No one has written the life story of one of the early prelates of the church in the far north.<sup>22</sup>

A writer in Scribner's *Magazine*<sup>23</sup> has attempted to prove that the Newport Tower was erected as a church by the Norsemen. It is scarcely probable that these voyagers would erect a church in this new country along any substantial plans unless it was due to the enthusiasm of the bishop above referred to. While the Norsemen were adherents of the church, it was not a deep seated faith that possessed them at this time, and it is not likely that they would erect a stone church instead of a stone

<sup>21</sup> Hosford, E. N., *Dis. of Ancient City of Norumbega*.

<sup>22</sup> Rafn, *Antiquitates Americanae*, pp. 330-332; Storm, G., *Islandske Aenaler*, 1888; *Landnáma-bók*.

<sup>23</sup> Hatfield, R. G., *Scribner's Magazine*, March, 1879.

fortress, as long as there were savages to fight and a vast country to conquer. We know from other sources that they erected fortifications, borgs, and other places for protection and shelter while they subdued various parts of Europe. It would be strange indeed that when forced to defend themselves against the natives of America, they would leave anything undone from a point of safety to themselves.

#### WAS THE TOWER BUILT BY NORSEMEN

We are led to believe that this tower was erected by the Norsemen, and that along in this very locality the Vinland colony was located. The tower was not erected for the purposes of a windmill to grind corn, neither was it erected for a place to say mass. It was simply a stronghold or fortress, similar to the borgs or brochs found on the Island of Mousa, the Ragnval Jarl tower in Waterford, Ireland, and the famous Jomsborg or castle of the Jomsvikings on the northeastern coast of Germany, and many others scattered over the countries occupied by the Scandinavian races from time to time. The Saga relates how Thorfin had to surround his borg by enclosures in order to defend his settlers against the natives. This shows that the stronghold must have been erected of more substantial material than timber, because the natives would have set fire to it.<sup>24</sup> It must have been erected of stone or some other substantial material. Leif and his thirty-five men erected first some small buildings, and later they constructed a substantial building on some familiar location which was readily found by subsequent explorers. Furthermore, Leif refused to sell his booths although he was asked to do so by several persons. It may have been that at this time he had in mind to return to the country and form a permanent settlement, or, it must have been of some real value for the reason that he would not part with title to it. This stronghold, then, erected by Leif must have been built of stone, or the natives would have destroyed it in the absence of the white settlers. Eric's buildings in Greenland were of stone. The Saga further refers to the incident that the natives fled to Thorfin's house and sought to break in, but he caused the doors to be barricaded and kept them out. This, of itself, would indicate that this building was not

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<sup>24</sup> The art of fire making was known to all the aborigines north of Mexico, Bul. 30, *Bur. Am. Ethnology*.

simply a wooden shack, but a well fortified and strongly constructed borg which could be easily defended against a race who possessed no other weapons than flint pointed arrows, tomahawks, and slings. The Sagas relate how the effort of the Norsemen to make a permanent settlement failed, for the very reason that later settlements failed that were backed by governments at home and by more numerous settlers keeping in close touch with the mother country. Thorwald states, as he pulled the arrow from his body after a battle with the natives, "I am fat about the paunch, we have come to a rich country, but we shall scarcely obtain any profit from it." This indicates what the chieftain thought of the country, and such a dark foreboding expressed by the leader must have paralyzed his followers from attempting any further settlement at that time.

Thorfin after one of many battles fought called his followers together to talk over the situation as to further resistance against the natives. Without any hopes of assistance from kindred at home, far removed from the base of supplies, the company agreed to return home and abandon the settlement which had been maintained with so much difficulty in spite of the fact that they found the natives deficient in bodily strength and manly courage.

Other evidence may be cited to prove that Europeans at some time or another must have visited this locality long prior to the coming of the Pilgrims. In the '60's a road was constructed from the city of Newport easterly across Lily Pond to the southeast part of the island, where fashionable Americans were erecting their summer homes. This pond from all appearances had been at one time a part of the ocean and had been gradually filled up with sand which had been washed up by the ocean waves. Since the coming of the English the pond had been known and looked upon simply as a marsh. In this pond, buried in the sand and blue clay, workmen dug up a boat, while they were constructing this road, which now goes by the name of Ocean Drive. Near where the boat was dug up, on some rocks which were blasted the workmen came across certain picture writing of ships carved thereon with some sharp instrument. Nothing was especially thought of this find till the Viking ship came to Newport in 1893, bound for the World's Fair at Chicago, when J. P. Hammond, an old resident of Newport, recalled what he, Edward Kearny, J. A. Hammond, and others had seen as

young men, of the boat which had been dug up in Lily Pond. The following is part of Mr. Hammond's letter in reference to the boat that he with others had seen as a young boy:

"I remember our talk concerning the finding of a boat near the so-called Lily Pond about forty-five years ago. I, in company with four or five boys, all of them older than myself, two of whom were my brothers, saw this boat in question. As near as I can remember she was about twenty-five feet long, with considerable shear. The stem was quite prominent, and deeply, though roughly carved. The stern piece was narrow and wedged-shape, with peculiar rough carving thereon. She was deep or high sided and had quite a narrow flat bottom. The boat was evidently built for speed and rough service, as her timbers were good and strong. She had been dug out of a sand bar by workmen, who were building the new road, or 'Ocean Drive,' as it is now called. The sand bar separates Lily Pond from the sea, the pond being at some time, years ago, nothing more than an inlet or bay of the ocean. There are three large ponds on the south end of the island of Rhode Island which have been formed by the sea casting up a sand bar and being added to little by little by later storms and drifting sands so that the present generations, and probably several generations preceding this, have looked upon these ponds and thought they have existed since the Creation, but they have not been always as they are today, or as they were forty-five years ago. And when the boat in question was buried, the bar was forded just sufficient to let it stick after it had been abandoned or drifted ashore from seaward. After a time the drifting sand — there was plenty in the neighborhood, covered the boat and she lay there securely for years and it must have been a good many years, for her timber was as black as bog oak and it takes time to color wood like that, so I conclude that the boat must have lain there undisturbed for several centuries at least. The boat was only slightly damaged and decayed considering the length of time it had been covered in with sand and clay. The sun and air probably did make a wreck of her indeed.

"The story told by the local wise men, was that according to her construction and general appearance and evident age it must have been built by the Norsemen in the long ago. On a rock near the sea which was blasted away, the workmen declared



that they saw rude carved pictures of a vessel, with one mast and sail, with other objects about it. Whether this was carved by Indians or by someone who wished to notify comrades, or friends, can only be conjectured. There is one thing certain, that if the carving was done by an Indian, he certainly must have seen the object he pictured.

"Of the picture on the rocks I have personally no knowledge but I have it from what you can term reliable sources. The pictured rocks were within a quarter of a mile of the sand bar where the boat was found. I saw the Viking ship in Newport harbor, which was the first port on this side of the Atlantic which it touched, and her rig tallies with the rig of the rock artist's ship mystery."

We are assured that the ships used on the Vinland trips were larger than the ordinary merchant ships. Such ships were from one hundred to one hundred and fifty feet long, and drew from eight to ten feet of water. Small boats were always used on the larger ships in making landings, and in obtaining provisions and water for the vessels. The Gogstad ship, discovered in 1880, was built about the year 900, and was about one hundred feet long and in it were found in the bow of the ship three small boats, the keels of which were respectively twelve, sixteen, and twenty-three feet long. The largest of the small boats also carried a mast. These boats had ore-locks fastened to the gunwale, instead of holes for the oars, such as the larger vessels were provided with.

The Sagas relate that the Vinland ships carried several small boats. It is stated that "when Leif discovered the sailors on a rock, he set out a small boat to make the rescue." At another time Leif used another style and make "of small boat in gathering grapes, with which to fill his ship on his return voyage." In the Thorfin Saga it is recorded that, "when Thorwald was getting his ship ready he sent the long boat along the coast westward and explored the land during the summer." The same Saga also refers to the fact that "the merchants ship was sent eastward into the mouths of the firths." Here they brought the ship into harbor. These details in the Sagas substantiate the claims that the Vikings, engaged in the Vinland trade, sailed large ships, which were provided with various styles and makes of small boats.

The discovery of a Viking boat mired in the clay and sand of

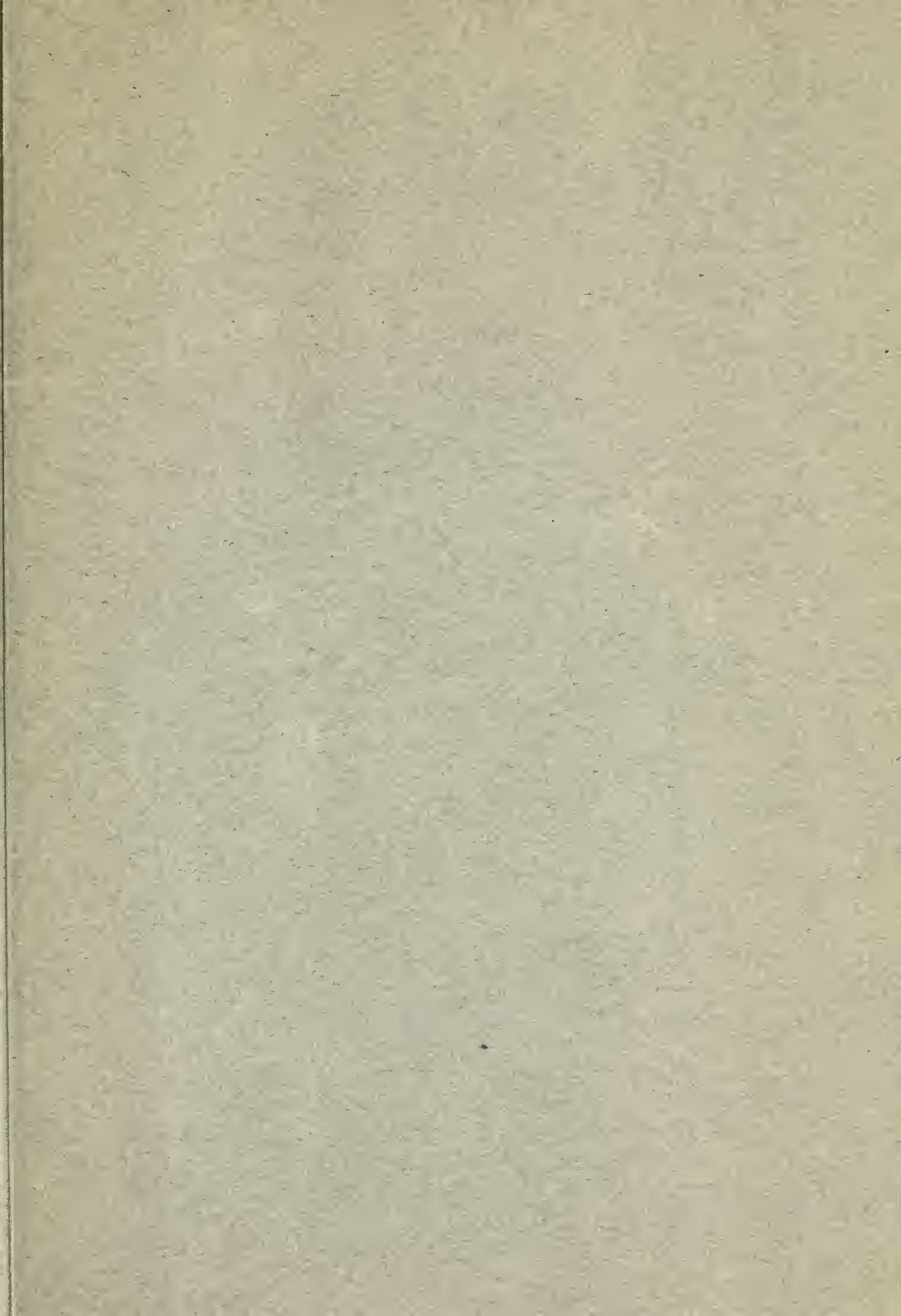
Lily Pond, which from all indications at one time had been part of the sea, would tend to prove that the early Norsemen may have used this arm of the sea as a landing place and that on top of the hill about eighty-five feet above the level of the sea they erected their stronghold which was duly fortified according to the usages of the times. The location of the tower could serve two purposes at least; a place of lookout, and a safe retreat in case of attack from the native tribes who were continually hovering around these strange giant looking persons clad in full armor. The inscription on the rocks in this vicinity, while perhaps not fully read or understood, may add some testimony to substantiate the contention that here was located the Vinland colony, and that the Norsemen erected the tower as a stronghold and place of lookout.

It is probable that Gurid, the wife of Thorfin, and the mother of Snorre, on the last morning before her departure may from an upper room in the tower have gazed out upon the turbulent sea which beckoned her homeward, and although the most anxious to depart for Vinland she may have been the most anxious to return without fear and with but few regrets.

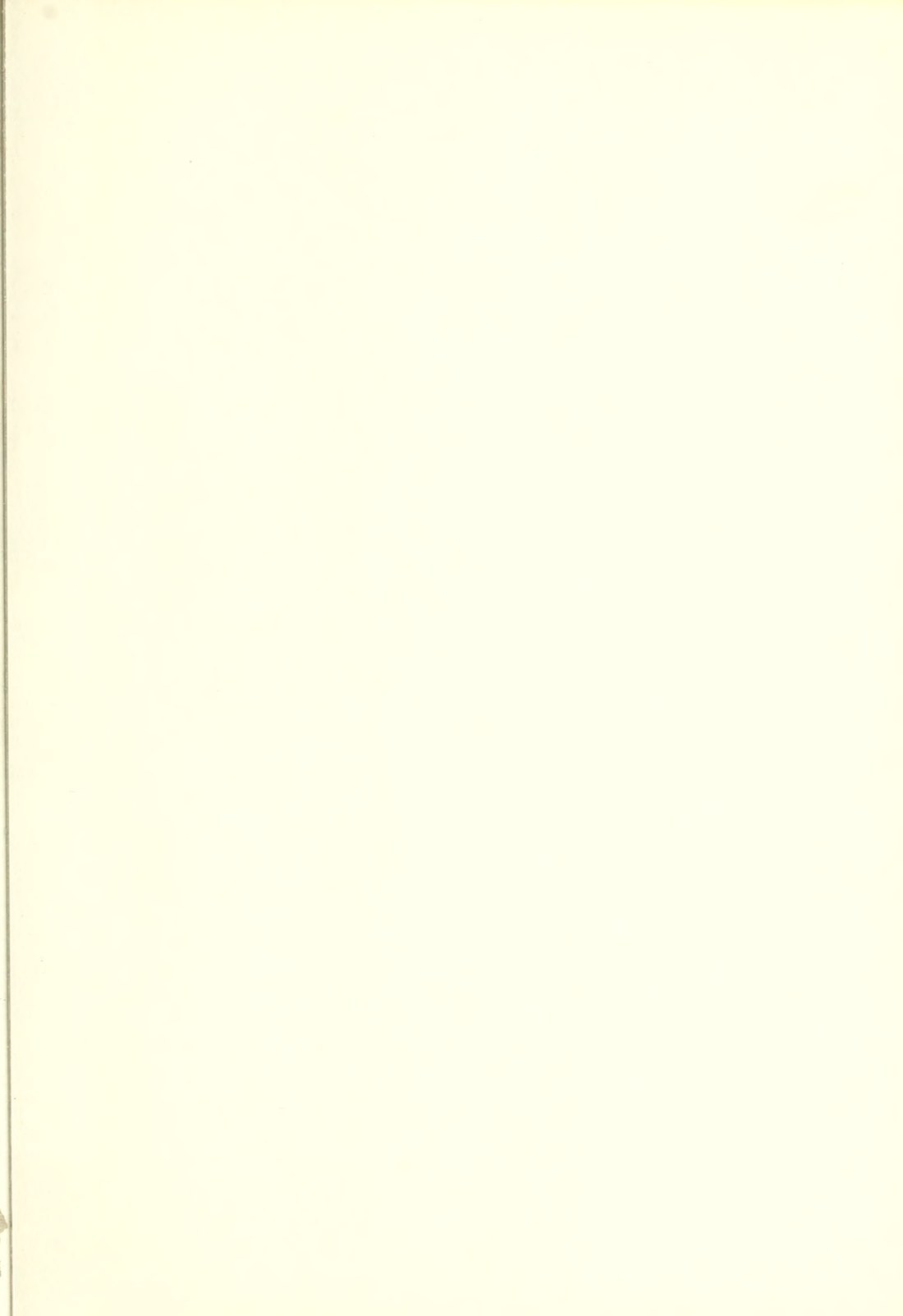


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