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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 1903.

HISTORICAL CLEANINGS

About the Past and Present—Facts of Interest—Jamestown, Rhode Island.

July 22, 1903.

To the diligent seeker after knowledge it is easy to find much to interest, in the fruitful fields of local history. Indians gave to this locality, long before the invasion of white settlers, the name of which "Conanicut" is an English corruption.

The island was purchased from the two Chief Sachems of the Narragansett tribes by white colonists in 1657; was incorporated as a town in 1678 and named "Jamestown" in honor of King James the second of England.

Conanicut Island is about nine miles long and from one to two miles wide, the Southern extremity being supposed to resemble the shape of a beaver's tail, the Northern part, a beaver's head. Upon the Southern part is the "Beaver's Tail Light House"; the oldest one in this country, as it was established in 1607, its site being upon the ruins of an old English fort.

There are many beautiful homes here and being in close proximity to Newport, the people of Jamestown can readily enjoy the resources of what is called "The Queen City," an "Island Gem," "In Ocean Setting." Newport is widely known as the Summer Residence of many American millionaires, the favored ones of fortune; their wealth apparently inexhaustible in spite of lavish expenditure. The establishments where they dispense hospitality, upon a scale which rivals royalty, are truly palatial for size and magnificence. Extending for miles along the Ocean front are a succession of estates in perfect order, with mansions fit to be dwelling places of rulers of Empires. The town of Newport was founded in 1639. The aborigines had given the island the name of "Aquidneck" signifying "The Isle of Peace. A fancied resemblance by the colonists to the Isle of Rhodes in the Mediterranean Sea, induced them to call it by its present name "Rhode Island." The city of Newport is on this Island in the Narragansett bay. Its local environment is highly favored by nature. Most of the grand homes belonging to Newport and its vicinity, occupying sites upon an elevated terrace. This natural terrace, continuing for miles, gently slopes on the West side down to the beach. There are two harbors, the outer one comprising a portion of Narragansett bay, lying between Conanicut Island and Rhode Island. This outer harbor has an entrance two miles in width, of twenty-nine fathoms depth of water, and unobstructed approaches, where vessels can enter and depart with any wind and where the combined fleets of the world could find safe and ample anchorage. The inner harbor is an almost enclosed water expanse, having the town on the East. One great attraction and entertainment at Newport, in the present time, is the opportunity to enjoy seeing elegant horses and carriages, with occupants attired in the latest styles in keeping with their wealth. This phase of fashionable modern life is daily to be seen in summer and every afternoon the side walks of the city are crowded with people anxious to view the pageant of wealth and fashion.

Newport possesses many other things of interest. There are historic relics that turn one's thoughts backward to times long since past. On one side of Washington Square is the "Perry House," a hotel which now occupies the site of the residence of the gallant Commodore Perry, after the famous battle of Lake Erie. A fine statue of the hero has been erected in the square as a memorial to him. The "Vernon Mansion" at the corner of Clark and Mary streets, was occupied by Count Rochambeau after the evacuation of Newport by the British forces, and in this handsome old colonial mansion General Washington was entertained on his first visit to this city.

Rhode Island is fortunate in possessing much earlier records than most of our American colonies, for as early as April 20th, 1524, the celebrated Florentine explorer, Verazzani, put in at the harbor of Newport. This Florentine explorer, like other Italian navigators of his time, had sailing orders from a foreign Sovereign, his patron being Francis I, of France, who sent him out with four ships as early as I have intimated, in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. Arriving after a tedious voyage at the harbor of Newport he remained here fifteen days, made charts of the coast, and also wrote a description of the region visited by him. The natives received the adventurers kindly, bartering furs and provisions, but, most unrighteously, the white men tried

stealthily to steal young women and children to carry back with them to Europe. Verazzani made his charts and claimed the whole country he visited in the name of the French king and called it "New France." The Italian invaders returning to Europe, the Indians remained in quiet possession of both the islands—Conanicut and Aquidneck until 1636, when Roger Williams, driven by religious persecutions from Massachusetts, came with his followers and founded this Province called "Rhode Island." In 1640 the Newport town authorities employed Robert Lent Hall to teach a public school, the first one in America and perhaps in the world, where children of all citizens could attend, the expense defrayed by a public tax.

Newport at the present time is a notable illustration of commercial changes, for in 1769 it had numerous factories and an extensive domestic and foreign trade being a far more important commercial emporium than the city of New York at that time and was second only to Boston among the cities of the thirteen colonies.

In 1729 Bishop Berkeley wrote "the town of Newport is the most thriving place in all America for big game. I was never more surprised than at the first sight of the town and its two harbors." Newport even then lingered in the memory of the visitor as a place of generous hospitality, gay entertainments, enlightened with officers dressed in scarlet coats, carrying swords, with jeweled hilts, and handsome scabbards, colonial dames, wearing rich brocade, lace ruffles, powdered hair, high heeled slippers, with gold buckles and waving delicate lace fans, all imported luxuries from the old world. The town was famed across the sea in the mother country for the elegance of its social life, during our colonial era.

A sad change soon came to Newport, with the advent of our struggles for National Independence. The blighting rule of the British Commander, General Prescott, impoverished the entire population, as a result of the war, which also brought about a commercial decline never since fully overcome. The first violent act of resistance to the unnatural harshness of the mother country towards her American Colonies, was the destruction of the British armed ship "Liberty," lying in Newport harbor in 1769. Admiral Esch Hopkins, of Newport, was the only naval officer holding that rank in these United States until our Civil War, Admiral Hopkins being promoted to that rank in 1775.

One learns so many interesting associations when personally visiting a famous locality which never before, even if previously brought to one's notice had seemed so impressive. Newport is well worthy of its fame for past records and present advantages.

"The General Assembly" of Rhode Island in session in the old "State House" in Newport, repealed the official act, pledging allegiance to the English crown, on the 4th of May, 1776, two months before the general "Declaration of Independence" was proclaimed by the whole thirteen American Colonies. The natural advantages of the situation of Newport, so instrumental in colonial days in building up its commercial prosperity proved during our Revolutionary War, a lamentable disadvantage, for the British appreciating its splendid harbor, seized the town early in the war, as a valuable rendezvous for their own ships, taking military possession Dec. 6, 1776. Eight thousand British and Hessian troops were quartered here commanded by Lord Perov, afterwards succeeded by Gen. Prescott. Admiral Howe's fleet spent the winter of 1777-1778 in the outer harbor of Newport. The town suffered great hardships during its occupation by the enemy. In the summer the troops went into camp life, and lived in tents, but in winter the whole large number of soldiers were quartered upon the inhabitants. The highly prized State House was converted into a hospital; all but two of the churches were turned into riding schools and stables. Every wharf built of wood was torn up and the material consumed as fuel. Gen. Prescott is said to have had a promenade made for his private benefit of the stone door steps taken away from the dwellings. The inhabitants of Newport were so despoiled by their military invaders and became so destitute, that contributions of the necessities of life were repeatedly collected and sent them from other more fortunate towns. The Rhode Island State Assembly furnished the town of Newport one thousand pounds in money and one hundred and sixty cords of wood, worth at that time, twenty pounds a cord in English gold.

The winter of 1778-1779 was unusually severe, for even that northern climate, and the people of Newport in their destitution suffered intensely, many dying from sickness.

When the French fleet under Count D'Estang was reported to have arrived off the coast of Georgia, the British commander in the city of New York, ordered the out-posts occupied by the English military forces to be speedily abandoned, that the soldiers might be more concentrated. Accordingly Newport was evacuated, the British hastily departing, but before they left, they sank thirty armed vessels in the inner harbor; fifteen or eighteen large transports in the outer harbor, burning, in addition eight or ten large ships of war to prevent their falling into the hands of the

Continued on Third Page.

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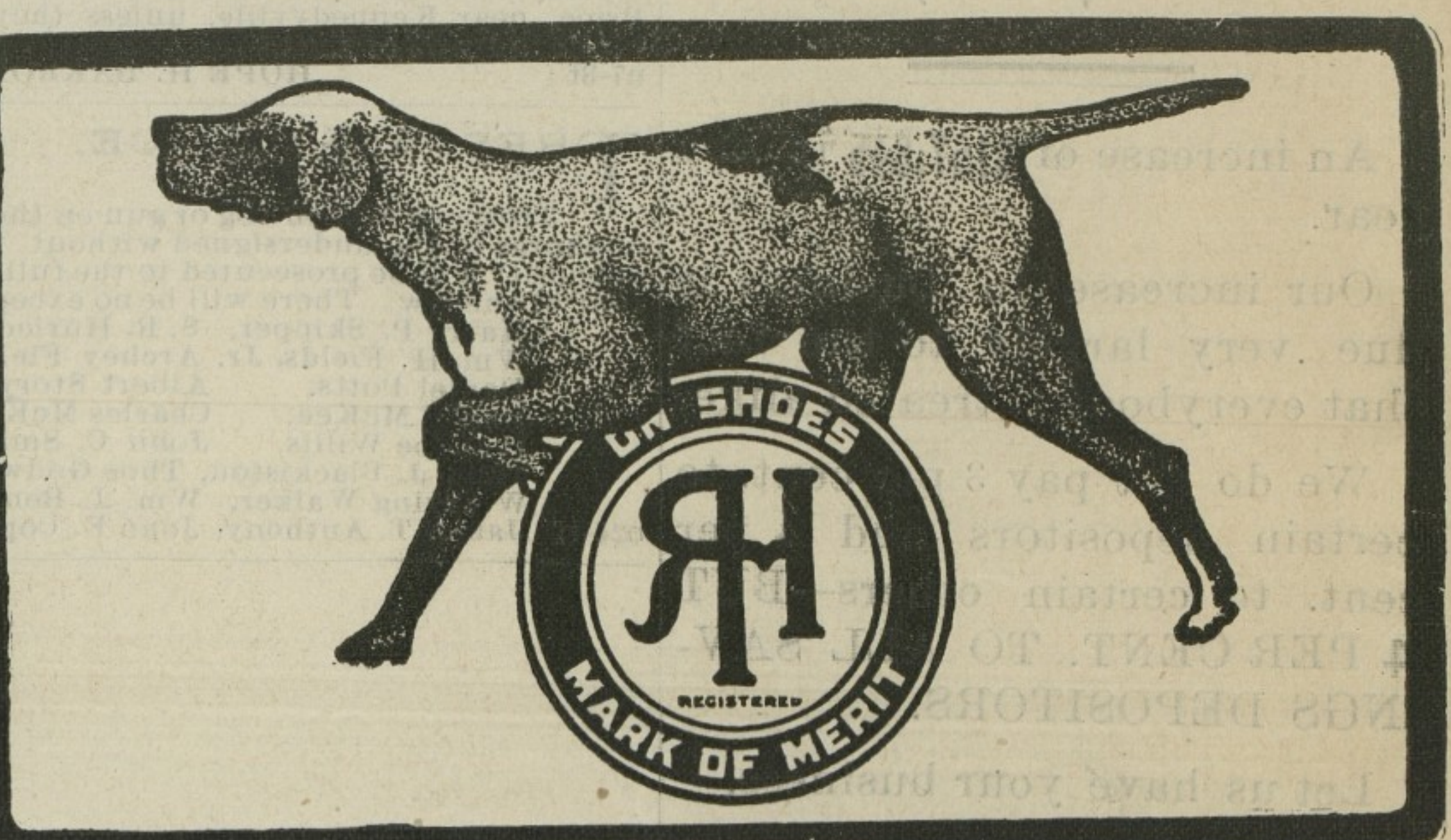
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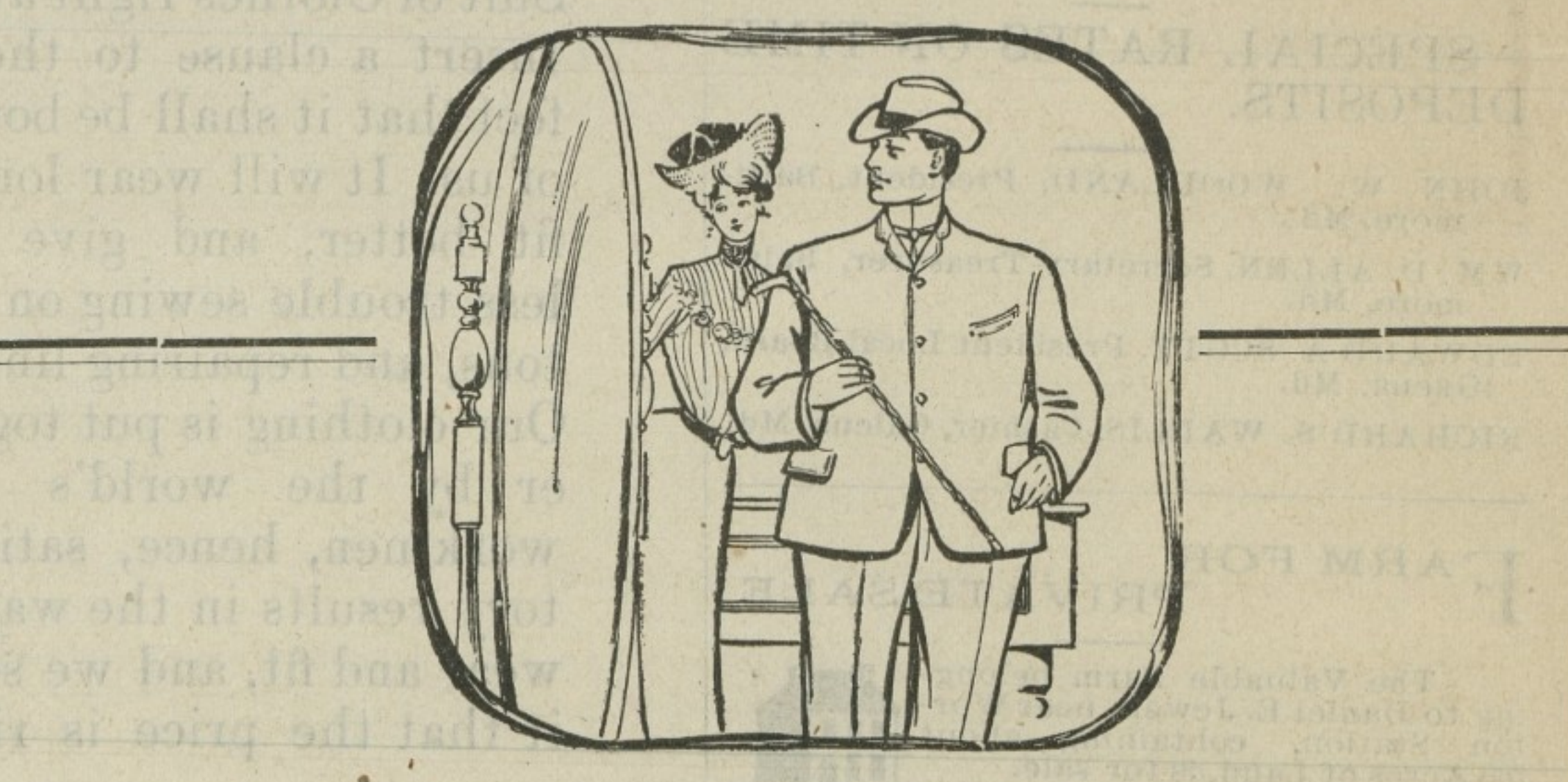
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