





MAKING HISTORY

On July 22, 1905, Portsmouth Harbor exploded, literally. The largest dynamite charge ever set by human hand to that date obliterated Henderson's Point, within sight of New Castle village. Thousands of onlookers gathered on the nearby shore to see if the carefully engineered explosion would indeed blast away a troublesome spit of land that had been a hazard to ships navigating the fast-flowing channel. Women with parasols and men in panama hats trained their eyes on a ledge on the Maine side of the Piscataqua River, focusing on the point locals called "Pull and Be Damned." Then the world shuddered and the crowd gasped as a series of eruptions sent plumes of earth (270,000 cubic yards of rock and soil) as high as 170 feet above the river.

The Rockingham Hotel hosted a gaggle of reporters from near and far to cover the doomsday explosion. Clusters of Wentworth Hotel guests traveled to the site in electric cars and were among the three thousand cheering members of the crowd who witnessed the thrilling exhibition of American ingenuity. Some carried booklets published by the Frank Jones Brewing Company that suggested the best vantage point for viewing the eruption that took place near where the Spanish prisoners had encamped seven years earlier. Despite rumors that the explosion might set off a chain reaction that could destroy the planet, the bold solution worked. Forty thousand tons of rock and dirt were removed in seconds. The only reported injuries of the day came when two



OPPOSITE: In 1905, hordes of tourists witnessed the massive controlled dynamite explosion that obliterated a point of land that had blocked navigation in Portsmouth Harbor. (ATH)

ABOVE: Although distant news to New Hampshire residents, media photographs brought home the reality of the Russo-Japanese War, which had claimed half a million lives by 1905. (ATH)



ABOVE: President Theodore Roosevelt met with delegates of both Russia and Japan at his New York summer home prior to the Portsmouth peace negotiations that ended the Russo-Japanese War. This news service photograph and Roosevelt's later award of the Nobel Prize has led some to conclude incorrectly that he attended the treaty meetings. Left to right: Sergius Witte, Roman Rosen, Theodore Roosevelt, Jutaro Komura, Kogoro Takabira. (ATH)

electric trolley cars, filled with people fleeing the region in fear, bumped into each other. But the great disappearing act at Henderson's Point was merely the warm-up for the show to follow—a show that would put the Wentworth Hotel in the global spotlight.

Half a world away from the seaside resort, Japanese and Russian soldiers were locked in an exhausting territorial war over Korea and the Sakhalin Islands. Astonishingly, half a million men had already died in the eighteen-month conflict. For Portsmouth residents, until the summer of 1905, it was a case of foreigners killing foreigners, an emperor battling a czar in a vague and mysterious land. Yet this war arrived like none before in history, and was depicted in modern newspapers as events occurred. Like unprecedented television coverage of the Vietnam War and Internet reporting in Iraq, correspondents with sophisticated new communication tools were turning war into a spectator event for millions. In the myriad of published combat photographs, it looks to contemporary eyes like a rehearsal for World War I. Men in endless rows crouch in trenches or creep forward, bayonets fixed. While the horrors of the two coming World Wars were not yet imagined in 1905, many feared that the Russo-Japanese War, the bloodiest war in world history to date, might spread into Europe and Asia as countries were forced to take sides and enter the fray.

Militarily, the island of Japan was showing remarkable skill against the massive Russian bear. Having taken on China in 1900 and having warned the Russian czar to stop his southern expansion toward Manchuria on the mainland, Japanese forces attacked Russian forces suddenly and successfully at Port Arthur on the Yellow Sea in neighboring Manchuria. When Russia responded by sending a fleet of sixteen modern destroyers and cruisers to retaliate, Japanese land artillery picked off all but one invading ship, suffering almost no losses of their own in the most successful military victory yet seen. But their heavy losses and costs had taken a toll on the island nation. Russia had the new Trans-Siberian Railroad line to replenish its army and a nearly limitless supply of peasant warriors, but the government, under the feeble hand of the last of the czars, was crumbling from within.



ABOVE: *Czar Nicholas II of Russia (top) and Emperor Mutsuhiro of Japan. (ATH)*



Enter Teddy Roosevelt, the Rough Riding American president and media hero of the Spanish-American War. Despite his aggressive reputation as the first self-appointed global policeman, Theodore Roosevelt was also a skilled negotiator. Concerned that the balance of world power was shifting dangerously, he invited Japanese Emperor Mutsuhito and Russian Czar Nicholas II to lay down their swords and talk. A souvenir postcard of what would become known as the Treaty of Portsmouth shows the three men shaking hands, although they never actually met. Below their portrait is a quotation attributed to Roosevelt: “We are good fighters, but we want peace.” All three world leaders stayed home as Japanese and Russian envoys arrived at what became a monthlong negotiation that ended with a cliff-hanger compromise. Both the Russian and Japanese delegations to the peace conference stayed at the Wentworth Hotel. When the event was over, Teddy Roosevelt became the first American president to win the Nobel Peace Prize and the estate of the late Hon. Frank Jones picked up the tab.

Exactly why Roosevelt selected little old Portsmouth remains a discussion point. Paris, The Hague, and Chefoo, China, were among the cities considered. Working hard to find the perfect conference site, the president wrote to the Japanese minister in Washington: “I am taking steps to try to choose some cool, comfortable and retired place for the meeting of the plenipotentiaries where conditions will be agreeable and where there will be as much freedom from interruption as possible.”

Roosevelt knew the Piscataqua area was well defended. As former assistant secretary of the Navy, he had helped beef up the region’s coastal defense system. Technically the treaty was negotiated at the Portsmouth Navy Yard, which is legally located in Kittery, Maine—a fact recently reconfirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in a border battle between New Hampshire and Maine. America’s oldest naval shipyard, established in 1800, celebrated its bicentennial in 2000.

Certainly Roosevelt, father of the Great White Fleet, knew the reputation of Portsmouth Navy Yard, home of the *U.S.S. Congress*, one of the original seven ships in the American navy and home to the *U.S.S. Kearsage*, which defeated the Confederate ship

OPPOSITE TOP: *Delegates traveled from New Castle to the Portsmouth Navy Yard in Kittery via steam launches. (ATH)*

OPPOSITE BOTTOM: *Delegates also traveled by auto and, as seen in this photograph from Harper’s Weekly, by stagecoach. Here Japanese diplomats depart from the Wentworth for Kittery aboard the Tally-ho. (ATH)*



ABOVE: *The big stick in a new role. Roosevelt received enormous worldwide publicity for his role as peacemaker in orchestrating the Portsmouth Treaty in New Hampshire. (ATH)*

OPPOSITE: *Both Japanese (above) and Russian delegates (below) posed for a number of group photographs at the Wentworth during their monthlong visit. They stayed in separate sections of the hotel. (ATH)*

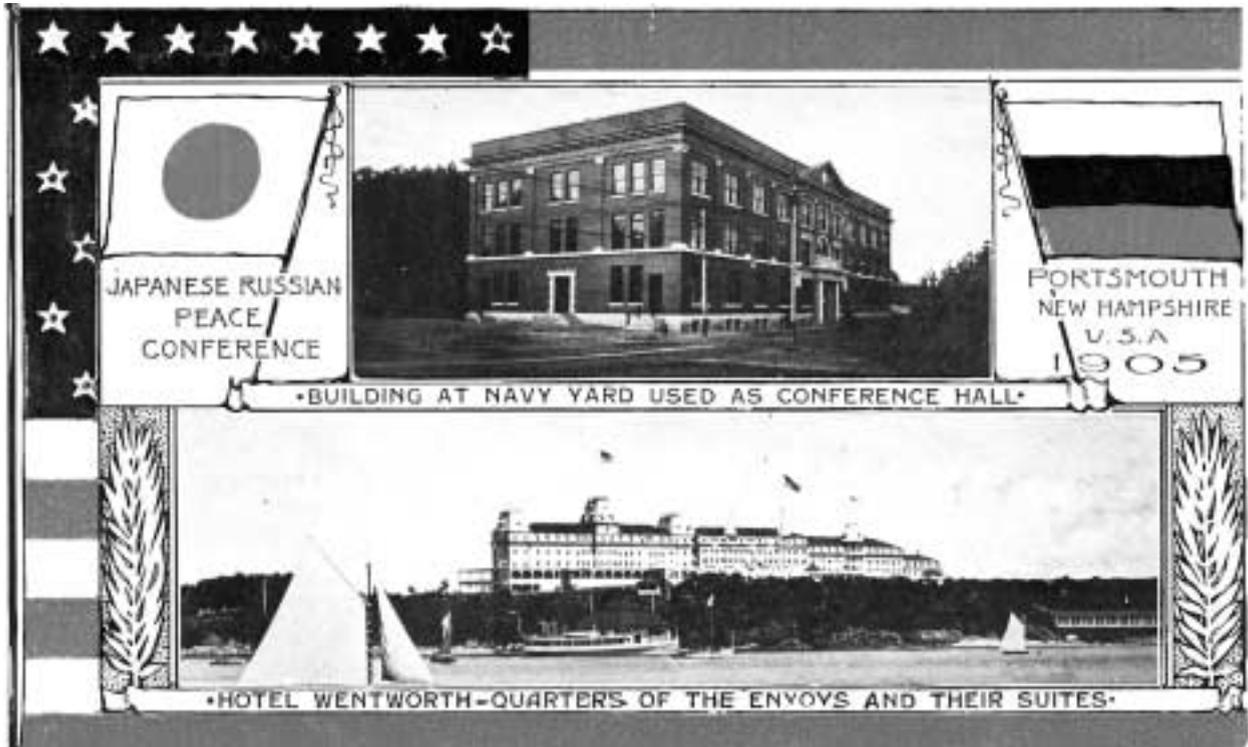
Alabama in the Civil War. He was likely aware that the Portsmouth shipbuilding tradition stretched as far back as 1690. He definitely knew that his boyhood hero John Paul Jones had launched the sloop-of-war *Ranger* from Portsmouth Harbor against the British in 1777. In fact, in 1905 Roosevelt's French emissary, Horace Porter, discovered the mummified 114-year-old remains of Captain John Paul Jones himself buried under the streets of Paris in a lead sarcophagus filled with alcohol. Earlier that same year Roosevelt had collected the corpse of the Scottish seaman and brought it "home" to America escorted by eleven battleships. Jones was reinterred in an elaborate crypt in the basement of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, with great pomp.

More important, Roosevelt needed a welcoming town, a hospitable community that would not show favoritism or antagonism toward either the Russian or the Japanese envoy. Big cities might be distracting; the delegates needed time to hunker down together and talk. More-populated resorts like those at Bar Harbor, Maine, or Newport, Rhode Island, might have too many tourists, planners feared. Still, the meeting place had to be accessible, populated enough to host the envoys and the press and with enough scenic attractions to entertain the dignitaries when they were away from the negotiating table. New Hampshire Governor John McLane, a fishing and hunting buddy of Roosevelt, informed the administration that the Bretton Woods Hotel in the White Mountains and the Wentworth Hotel in New Castle were ready, willing, and available.

The first hint that the Wentworth had been chosen appeared in the Portsmouth paper in early July, exactly a month before the delegates arrived. Judge Calvin Page, the man most clearly in charge of Frank Jones's estate, offered to house and feed both delegations at no charge. As far as records show, although both delegations left a tip and a \$10,000 payment to Governor McLane, the Jones's estate was apparently not reimbursed, except in publicity, which is paying dividends to this day.

Locals considered hoping, even assuming, that Roosevelt would take charge personally. A week before the conference, a newspaper offered this bullish prediction:





ABOVE: Souvenir postcards of the Treaty of Portsmouth featuring the Wentworth began to appear within two days of the meetings. This red, white, and blue card linked the hotel and the Peace Building at the Navy Yard as historic destination points. (LK)

RIGHT: Another popular postcard showed the Ambassador's Parlor in the Colonial Wing of the Wentworth. The Russians occupied this portion of the hotel, which has since been torn down. (ATH)



The President will undoubtedly make his headquarters at The Wentworth while here and will, it's expected, give a banquet to the envoys and their companions. This would be the most important social event in the history of New Hampshire and would add to the fame of New Castle's splendid hostelry.

Some of the earliest newsreel footage ever shot in Portsmouth chronicles the arrival of the Russian and Japanese delegates. The New Hampshire National Guard and military bands marched through a town thronged with visitors and decked out in bunting. Boys and girls in their Sunday outfits ran beside the horse-drawn carriages as Jutaro Komura of Japan and Sergei Witte of Russia, each doffing his high top hat, gestured to the cheering crowds. The arrival by boat from the *U.S.S. Dolphin* and *U.S.S. Mayflower* was partially staged. Witte and his group had already arrived secretly by train and settled into the Wentworth. Both men had met privately with President Roosevelt at his summer home in Oyster Bay, New York, days earlier.

Wentworth employees narrowly avoided a political faux pas as the foreign envoys arrived. A hotel staffperson had raised the Japanese flag on the main tower of the hotel where it waved near the Stars and Stripes for half an hour. Meanwhile a porter, balancing the Russian flag on his shoulder, climbed to the tower of the hotel annex, but discovered no rope attached to the pole. The porter returned the Russian flag to the front office, and hotel employees went into a huddle. Without a sturdy rope to display the Russian banner, and with the envoys on their way to the Wentworth, employees quickly lowered the Japanese flag and sent their own envoy to the local hardware store to find a sturdy rope. Neither nation's flag was flying as the delegates entered the main lobby, but hours later with the new halyard in place, the Wentworth porters raised the opposing colors from the rooftops.

For one month the delegates shuttled back and forth by Navy cutter from the Wentworth to the secure brick "Peace Building" just across the Piscataqua River for the hard negotiations. A treaty room was hastily created in just four days, and a small memorial to that room survives today at the Portsmouth



ABOVE: *Sergius Witte writes a letter from the hotel during a break in the negotiations. Whether he and Jutaro Komura talked privately in the Wentworth rose garden during the process is unknown. (ATH)*

Naval Yard. The world press, most of them housed at the Rockingham Hotel, reported every step of the process, formal and informal. The best and the brightest of the modern media sent constant dispatches, whether or not there was news. On a slow day, the fact that the delegates enjoyed New England brown bread and beans was telegraphed around the globe.

In one article a man and a woman wheeled their auto at high speed under the portico of the hotel annex, which housed the Russian delegation.

“I am Mr. Pingree of Boston,” the man announced, leaping from the car. “I want to see Mr. Witte immediately.”

“Mr. Witte is a busy man,” said Mr. Korostovetz to Mr. Pingree. Witte’s attendant had been quickly summoned. But “the man in 328” was busy. What was the nature, he asked, of Mr. Pingree’s urgent visit?

“I lived in Russia for two years,” Pingree explained. “I have experienced the hospitality Americans receive there and I want to shake Mr. Witte’s hand and tell him I am obliged for my treatment.”

Photographers immediately captured the extraordinary difference between the bearded Witte, more than six and a half feet tall, and the delicate frame of Komura, more than a foot and a half shorter. Cartoonists exaggerated the difference to the point where Komura appeared small enough to sit on Witte’s knee. In American political cartoons, Roosevelt often appeared larger than both men. Witte and Komura were highly intelligent. Komura had attended Harvard while Witte spoke fluent French. Both were committed, even when their leaders were not, to ending the gruesome war and reaching a peaceful compromise.

The sticking point from beginning to end was the issue of remuneration. Having won battle after battle, the Japanese expected a cash indemnity for the cost of the war from the Russians. The Russians refused. Twice Witte was called home when Komura refused to back down on this point. Witte stayed, however, and in the final day of the negotiations, just when all appeared lost, Roosevelt asked Emperor Mutsuhito to withdraw his demand for indemnity. Komura was allowed to back down—a dishonoring act that made him wildly unpopular with the

people of Japan—and the treaty was signed. On hearing the news, the mayor of Portsmouth ordered that church bells be rung for a full half hour, an expression of joy not seen in town since the end of the Civil War.

“Peace!” the *Portsmouth Herald* announced in five inch high letters on August 29, 1905. “Peace! That is the word that has electrified Portsmouth and sent a thrill throughout the world.” The Treaty of Portsmouth was signed officially at the Navy Yard on September 5.

A century after the Russo-Japanese War, historians remain intrigued by just what went right in Portsmouth. The success of the treaty was by no means inevitable. Japanese political cartoons from the era picture the Russian bear devouring the globe while Russian soldiers gnaw on the bones of their victims. Anti-Asian illustrations depicted the Japanese as a subhuman race deserving of extermination. Yet something in the welcoming seacoast community mitigated all that for thirty crucial days. Something intangible spoke to Witte and Komura and to all the members of their delegations as they spent time among the locals, who urged them toward peace. A key factor in the creation of that hospitable environment was the Wentworth Hotel.

The technical term is multi-track diplomacy. While the diplomats hammered out the articles of peace in formal negotiations around the leather-covered walnut table at the Navy Yard, a flurry of social events influenced the foreign envoys away from the table. Witte complained in his diary that his rooms at the Wentworth were too small and the food at first not to his liking. When word of this hit the press, both Harvey and Wood, the Wentworth managers, and a Russian spokesman explained that reported complaints by Witte were “entirely false.” Generally the delegates were thrilled with the lavish accommodations. Housed in separate wings of the hotel with private entrances, both delegations had similar accommodations, all with ocean views and private transcontinental communications. Some historians believe that Witte and Komura communicated directly during private walks through the hotel rose garden.

The delegates met informally at the hotel to work out details of the tentative peace. They posed for group photographs on the



ABOVE: Political cartoonists made much ado about the comparatively short stature of the Japanese emperor and his diplomats. Japan, in the end, agreed to give up its demand for reparations, causing delegates to lose face in the final treaty outcome. (ATH)



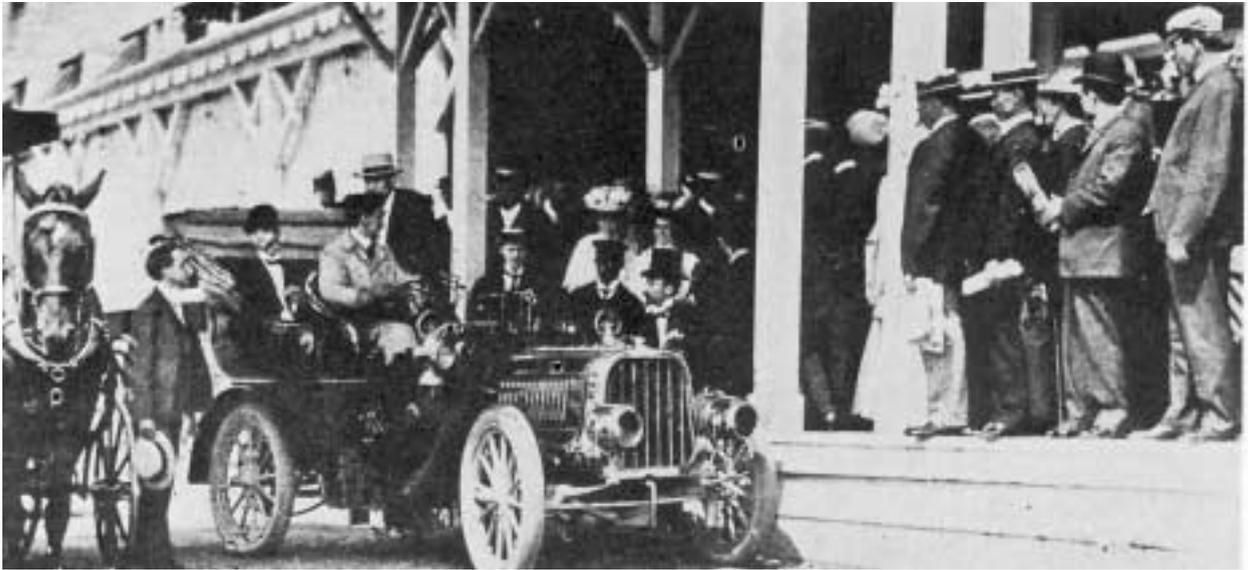
ABOVE: *Enemies no more. A Japanese and Russian soldier meet after the battle at Port Arthur. (ATH)*

veranda and met at the hotel with Roosevelt's emissary. Although newspapers warned that the dignitaries would not be visible, both groups mingled openly with hotel guests. Witte, a master of public relations, seemed to revel in the attention; Komura was more private. Witte attended a piano recital at the hotel and was thronged by ladies from Portsmouth. Komura held a "Love Fest" ball at the hotel following the signing of the treaty. One newspaper account describes an impromptu performance on the hotel piazza by "three negro boys" singing "My Louisiana Lou" while other boys performed acrobatics on a bicycle, to the great delight of Russian delegates.

The Wentworth provided a safe, comfortable home base from which both Japanese and Russians could make day and evening trips. The teams moved in tandem, seemingly orchestrated actions as the diplomatic dance played out. After the Russians motored about the coastal roads in spiffy 1905 Pope-Toledo motorcars, the Japanese did the same. When the Russians attended church in Portsmouth, the Japanese went to church in Kittery. The Russians met with a Jewish group and the Japanese visited a Baha'i community in Eliot. After Komura visited New Hampshire politicians in Manchester, a group from the Amoskeag Mills there dined with Witte at the hotel. Both envoys gave identical contributions to York Hospital and the York Historical Society. Both visited the Isles of Shoals, traveled in the hotel's "Tally-Ho," attended the hotel theater and banquets, shopped in Portsmouth, and dined at the Wentworth with influential local figures.

Only the weather refused to cooperate. Not even the Wentworth, despite its scientifically proven records for cool weather and ocean breezes, could escape an oppressively hot and muggy summer. "M. Witte Expected It Would Be Cooler" the *Herald* announced on the front page on August 9. But the heat wave continued, bringing on an aggressive army of mosquitoes that plagued the peace process.

Ensnared safely in Oyster Bay, New York, Teddy Roosevelt monitored and manipulated the peace process. He arranged for a fancy garden party for Witte at Niles Cottage in New Castle. The Niles family had vacated for the month, allowing Assistant



Secretary of State H. O. Pierce and his family to host the Russians, then the Japanese. Roosevelt's emissaries raced back and forth from the Wentworth to Oyster Bay, among them his secretary William Loeb, father of the future controversial publisher of *The Manchester Union Leader*. The delegates were able to contact their leaders by transatlantic cable recently installed at Rye. From New York, Roosevelt cabled the czar and the emperor directly, finessing points of the treaty, and finally convincing the Japanese leader, for the good of all, to relent on his key demands.

The compromise ultimately pleased neither side. By backing down, the Japanese lost face, and Baron Komura suffered the anger of the Japanese people. Both nations, for a time, became American allies, then enemies, then allies again as the twentieth century unfolded. But the Treaty of Portsmouth is still seen by many as a textbook example of successful diplomacy. War was averted. Lives were saved. One of the world's first modern media events played out in an increasingly interconnected globe.

Wentworth staff members, at least, were satisfied with the peace conference. The Japanese delegation made good on promises to leave a generous tip. Mr. Witte and his assistant Baron Rosen matched the Japanese gifts, distributing one thousand dollars among hotel employees. Russian secretaries, according to the newspaper, tipped well too. A full accounting appeared in

ABOVE: Japanese delegates motor up to the Wentworth among a host of visitors. Curious New Englanders turned out by the thousands to see and support the delegates during the treaty process. (ATH)



ABOVE: *The diplomats at the table during the difficult treaty discussions in the Peace Building at the Navy Yard. (ATH)*

print, and offers a look at the people behind the scenes who helped create the positive atmosphere in which the delegates operated.

The stewards and cooks were given \$90 each; two girls who cared for the apartments of the plenipotentiaries received \$30 each; ten French waiters were given \$10 each; three table waiters, \$30; fourteen bellboys, \$10; two elevator boys, \$31; two hat men \$5.00 each; three porters, \$40.00; mail carrier, \$65.00. The private chef was also liberally rewarded. After that they called on the employees in other parts of the hotel who were not much in contact with the guests and left with them hundreds of dollars.

A final and little-known Treaty anecdote, a favorite of former *Portsmouth Herald* editor Ray Brighton, speaks volumes about the way the press covers world news. Besides transmitting more than two million words from the telegraph lines in Portsmouth, reporters had long gaps of time with little to amuse them. During the monthlong negotiations, the story goes, more and more reporters were seen wearing a distinctive badge made from a narrow strip of white satin knotted with a strip of yellow ribbon and bearing the initials OSVC. A number of Japanese delegates too sported the decoration and, at one point, so did Ambassador Witte, who was secretive about its origin during the conference.

The emblem turned out to be a prank. American reporters created the Society of the White Ribbon to parody the red ribbons worn by many European reporters. Fernando W. Hartford, owner of the *Herald*, was among the co-conspirators, mostly prominent journalists working for newspapers in Boston and New York. The acronym stood for “The Order of St. Vitus of Crete.” The origin of the secret fraternity was later unmasked as an in-house joke. Long after the conference adjourned the *Herald* reported:

The society took its name from St. Vitus, who, like the modern newspaperman was continually jumping from place to place and the statement from an ancient Greek that “All Cretans



are liars.” This statement was the grand password. The white of the society’s emblem represented the innocence of the public; the yellow, the yellow streak in every newspaperman. The members were solemnly warned never to tell the truth if it could possibly be avoided.

ABOVE: Since the signing of the treaty in 1905, international visitors have traveled to view Wentworth by the Sea, an increasingly important symbol of the successful peace process. Here, during the Smith ownership in the 1970s, Japanese visitors Fumihiko Togo, the Consul General, and his wife meet with Portsmouth City Councilman Bill Keefe. (ATH)