

HISTORICAL NOTES

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Photo taken from Prudence Island in 1923 of the **Cape Verde**. From the East Passage Exhibit.



1954 Earl Horton on roving patrol near ammunition magazine.

From the President - *By Judi Foster*

The Board of Directors is excited to share four new exhibits at the museum covering the Impact of WW II, the History of Prudence Island Schools, East Passage and Island Voices. The exhibits provide glimpses into various aspects of island life dating back to the early 1900s through modern times. This is the third year of museum operation and each year the displays have expanded in size and scope. Through both concerted efforts and serendipity, we have been able to expand our collections of photographs and artifacts. Our hope is that Islanders will consider donating items to the museum archive to ensure that our island history is preserved for island generations to come.

The Board would like to acknowledge the support of the ADDD Fund at The Rhode Island Foundation for the purchase of display materials to house the exhibit on the history of one-room schools on Prudence Island.

The Basic Life Of A Sailor On Prudence Island Naval Magazine. *By Earl Horton*

(Editorial Note: Because of its strategic position in Narragansett Bay, US Armed Forces used Prudence Island for coastal defense and ammunition storage. Mr. Earl Horton who was stationed at the naval base just after WW II, provides an unique perspective of life on the island base and the role that the base played in defending the East Coast.)

I was a member of the U.S. Navy Seabee Reserves during the Korean War at Fort Hale, New Haven, CT. The CB stands for Construction Battalion. This is the Navy's unit that is similar to the U.S. Army engineers. I worked for the New Haven Gas Company as a pipe fitters helper and was qualified to do gas piping since 17 years of age.

In 1953 I was drafted by the army. The Navy put me on active duty in the Navy for two years. I went to boot camp and then to a 16-week pipe fitter and welding school in Norfolk, Virginia. When I graduated from school, I was given the option to leave the Seabees and convert to regular Navy. I had 14 months to go of active duty. I was given 2 weeks leave and then reported to U.S. Naval Net Depot Melville, Rhode Island. Melville was a submarine net depot construction unit and a fuel depot. It also had a large dock facility that a repair ship the Yosemite was docked at on a permanent basis.

Newport at this time was the homeport for the U.S. Navy Destroyer Fleet in the North Atlantic. They were all anchored out up and down the bay. There were very few docks. There were large buoys called mikes anchored out in the bay. A Destroyer would tie up to the large hook on the mike and several destroyers would then tie up to that one, and so on, with about 5 or 6 destroyers held in that one location. This was all up and down the bay. The Yosemite docked at Melville also always had several destroyers alongside of it. Melville was the PT boat training school in WWII 8 years earlier. John Kennedy was stationed there at one time.

Prudence Island Historical & Preservation Society Board Of Directors

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One of the additional duties that Melville performed was to provide boat transportation for us to get to Prudence Island. These boats were docked next to the Yosemite. I arrived there in March of 1954. I reported to the Melville barracks and was told I would be taken out to Prudence Island the next morning. I asked what was on Prudence Island; the reply was I don't know. The next morning I got my first ride in a 40 ft open motor whaleboat to the T Pier on Prudence Island. When I reported in the administration building, I was told I was to report to the maintenance garage.

I became a member of the five-man crew who were responsible for maintenance on trucks, tractors, bulldozers, the very few buildings that were there, and the Island itself. We cut grass, cut brush from the fire lanes in the woods with farm tractors and I at 21 years old was the base plumber. I just did minor repairs - if it was a major problem, civilians came over from Melville.

There were five men in the garage, in addition to maintenance work. We drove flatbed ammunition trucks. When a ship came in for a load of ammunition we drove down to the dock, picked up the ships working party on a school bus and one of our gunners mates would take them to the magazine that stored what they were after. They would have to load the ammunition on the truck using the human chain method. The gunners mate would record the completion of the order. We would drive them back down to their ship and they used the human chain method to transfer the ammunition on the ship. The types of ships we supplied were destroyers and submarines. We had all of the types of ammunition used on a destroyer plus torpedoes, mines and depth charges for anti-submarine warfare.



1954. Earl Horton with depth charges in ammunition magazine.

In addition to the garage crew there were 15 gunners mates, 15 mine men and 10 officers and chiefs. The mine men did continuous maintenance on the torpedoes and mines in a shop they had on the left side of the main road coming up from the T-pier. All the magazines for the mines and torpedo's were on the left side of the main road. The gunners mates did similar work in maintaining the ammunition used on the destroyers. Daily checks were made on the condition of the gunpowder.

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In addition there were two other activities that operated there. On Gould Island to the south was a torpedo firing range. They fired torpedoes from submarines up the bay to the left of Prudence Island. There was an underwater tracking range that was operated by a civilian from a shack on the left side of the Island. Divers recovered these torpedoes after use. There was another small building at our dump. There were four frogmen there. It was their job to return ammunition of all types that had failed to go off and take it apart to see what had failed. Torpedoes fired from Gould Island often went off course and would come up on the beach to the right of the T - Pier.



Torpedo on shore of island

To refill the ammunition magazines when supplies got low, barges from Hingham, Mass would arrive at our T -Pier. Every man on the Island below the rank of chief would be required to drop all other forms of work and join the working party to move the ammunition to the magazines. All the work was done by the human chain method, from the barge to a truck, and then into a magazine. If the ammunition type was light, the men in the line were spaced farther apart, and we threw the item to the next man. If it were heavy, we handed it to the next man, such as the 5-inch gun projectiles at 55 pounds.

In addition to the types of work I have covered, the most important job we had was the guarding of the complete base. We had 3-section liberty every third day in addition to your workday; you pulled guard duty 4 hours on and 4 hours off for 24 hours. There were three guard locations: one on the T-Pier in a shack; one in a truck, roving patrol; and, one in the radio shack. All were armed with 45 caliber pistols. On weekends you had 4 hours on and 4 hours off for the complete weekend every 3rd weekend. You got two weekends off and then one on.

On August 31, 1954, I had been there 5 months. Hurricane Carol hit the Island with a tidal wave that lifted all the decking off the T-Pier and washed it up in the woods about 300 yards. We lost our ability to dispense ammunition, for a short period we got food supplies using landing craft used to land infantry. A Seabee unit was sent to us from Davisville. They worked from sun up to sun down and had four meals a day. They restored about fifty feet of the pier in three days. It was enough to allow ammunition to be loaded into the boats and taken out to a ship. When I left the Island one year later they were still working on restoring the T-Pier.

At about half way through my tour of duty there the government decided to use civilians to do all maintenance work on bases in the U.S. A work crew came over each day on the boat. Most of their time when I was there was the restoring of the T-Pier. I believe **John Canario**, notable on Prudence as a conservationist, was in the first group of workers.



Ca. 1920s. Group photo on steps of schoolhouse.

A History of Prudence Island Education

By Donna Bains

(Editorial Note: The current schoolhouse, built in 1896, is one of the few remaining one-room schoolhouses in the state of Rhode Island. It has survived several closings and major changes in administration. Donna Bains provides a history of education on Prudence Island)

Prudence Island has always been a place where the residents have put a high value on educating their children. According to Prudence Historian Charles Maytum, legend would have it that Roger Williams taught the Native American children living on Prudence in 1637 at the site of Pulpit Rock.

We do know that as early as 1733 island children were taught at a farmhouse located on the North End of Prudence, near Sheep Pen Cove until 1743. At that time, the Sweet, Allin, Smith and Pearce families resided on Prudence and it was their children who were taught at this school.

In 1743, there is further evidence that John Pierce, who lived on the South End of Prudence, insisted that his children be educated until the age of 15 and they were driven the six miles to the North End to go to school at the home of Gideon Freeborn until 1747.

The first school building was erected in 1763 on the highest elevation on Prudence. In an early book of land evidence in the Portsmouth Town Hall, it is recorded that on December 12, 1763, Ebenezer Allin sold to Oliver Earl, treasurer of the Town of Portsmouth, a lot of land 250 square feet on Prudence Island. The school was built shortly after the recording of this deed. This site is located on the Baker Farm property now owned by Prudence Conservancy. The school was burned by the British, during one of the battles on Prudence during January 1776 or in later raids in 1777 when every building (except one) on the island was destroyed. After the battle in 1776, the islanders were forced to flee to the mainland for the remainder of the war.

By the early 1780's there were enough people living on Prudence again to build a new school. This second schoolhouse was built in 1782 on land owned by John Brown and was located southwest of Sunset Hill Farm, the present

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home of Nate and Barbara Bacon. It was located near the northeast corner of the Schoolhouse Swamp, which is where the swamp got its name. It stood under a huge elm tree, a tree that still stood during the early part of the 20th century because in an article written by Halsey Chase in 1932, he mentions the tree is still standing.

In 1828, this schoolhouse was moved to the original site of the 1743 schoolhouse. The foundation still remains today. It was named the South School. Photos and post cards of this building show it was 20x25 feet with 8 windows that gave a view of the entire island. The 1828 census shows that there were 54 children living on Prudence at that time. This school was used until 1896 when the present school was built.

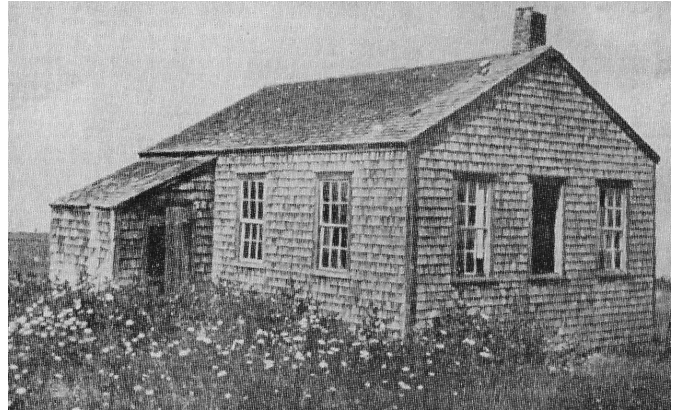


Photo of the South School that was located about 400 yards north of the Baker Farm, near the highest point on the island. It operated at that site from 1820 until the 1895 school year.

In 1854, because of the distance that the North End students, as well as the Patience Island students had to travel, a second school was built by Charles W. Potter on land owned by Brown & Ives. It was officially named the North End School but islanders called it the Potters Cove School. For the first three years it was operated as a private school paid for by the North End residents but in 1857 those residents applied to the town of Portsmouth for funds to support the school and they agreed to use town funds for that purpose. It was closed around 1891 but reopened for one year in 1903. Evidence of this school can still be found on land now owned by the State of Rhode Island, although not where a sign was placed by DEM.

The present school was built in 1896 on land donated by the Prudence Land Company. It was originally named the Prudence Park School, but is now called the Prudence Island School. After the steamboats stopped coming to Prudence Park in 1918, the bell located on the Prudence Park depot was donated to the school by the Prudence Land Company and it still rings for the students today. An addition was added in 1954 and indoor plumbing was installed at that time. Over the years, it educated children from K-8, K-5 and K-12 depending on the wishes of islanders and whim of the Town of Portsmouth. In 1982 the school was closed because there were no elementary age children living on Prudence. It was reopened in 1989 for children K-5.

Shortly thereafter the Friends of the Prudence Island School was formed to raise funds for extracurricular activities. Islanders also volunteered to help maintain the

schoolhouse and teach music, art, physical education and other programs. This was all to keep education costs down so the school department would keep the school open.

In 2009, the Friends of the Prudence Island School became the Prudence Island School Foundation, a 501c3 organization. Later that same year, due to the Portsmouth school superintendent's efforts to close the school and make the children commute off island (which would involve a 10 hour school day) and an unsuccessful legal argument before the RI Board of Education, an agreement was worked out by the Prudence Island School Foundation and the Portsmouth School Department to oversee education at the schoolhouse and the town of Portsmouth would provide money to educate elementary age students. PISF became responsible for the complete educational framework at the school, including developing and implementing educational plans, purchasing curriculum, assessing student progress and reporting their progress to state and local education authorities.



Capt. Halsey Chase built the present school on land donated by the Prudence Land Company in 1896. It was called the "Prudence Park School". Photograph was taken in 1914.

For over 300 years, the residents of Prudence Island have shown how much they value education and their pride in the accomplishments of Prudence Island school children. May Prudence Islanders always feel that educating children in their own island school is worth preserving. (Sources: Early Paragraphs of Prudence Island by Charles Maytum; Prudence Island School Foundation at prudenceislandschool.org)

Membership & Donation Form

The major sources for museum operations and Society activities are memberships and donations. Please take a moment to complete the enclosed 2015 PIHPS membership renewal form. Individual memberships are \$15. Family memberships are \$25. A Sponsor level membership is available for \$50. Your dues help to fund the Society's activities and programs. Please help us to preserve Prudence Island's rich history by returning the enclosed form along

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with your check today. Membership information is also available at our web site: www.prudencehistory.com.

Sponsored Activities



Joe Bains gives tour of Sand Point 2013.

Tour*/Session	Guide/Moderator	Date	Time
Annual Meeting	Board of Directors Union Church	Saturday, June 27	11:00 am
Naval Magazine	Joe Bains	Saturday, July 11	11 am to 12 pm
Homestead Ave. & Historic Cemetery	Joe Bains	Saturday, July 18	11 am to 12 pm
Sand Point Tour	Joe Bains	Saturday, August 1	11 am to 12 pm
Genealogy Workshop	Joyce Lower	Thursday, August 13	3 to 5 pm
"Evening With Island Authors"	Sharon Homan	TBA	7 to 9 pm

* Tour and Workshop fee is \$5 for members & \$10 for non-members

Museum Hours

Open every Saturday from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm beginning May 23 thru October 10. Beginning July thru August, also open Wednesday 1 pm to 3 pm. For individual or group visits outside of regular hours email pihpsociety@verizon.net



2015

Prudence Island Historical & Preservation Society Membership**Mail to: PIHPS, P.O. Box 193, Prudence Island, R.I. 02872**

Name & Name Of Family Members (if applicable)				
Email Address				
Mailing Address	Summer:		Winter:	
Phone #	Island:		Winter:	
Circle Membership Category	Youth (12-18 yrs) \$5.00	Individual \$15.00	Family \$25.00	Sponsor \$50.00
Donation to Museum operation & maintenance	Amount \$ _____			
Volunteer Circle 1 or more	Museum Housekeeping	Museum Docent	Annual meeting preparations	
Total Amount	Amount enclosed \$ _____			

Thank You!

-----Cut here for receipt-----

Keep this part for your records

-Receipt-

PIHPS, P.O. Box 193, Prudence Island, R.I. 02872

PIHPS registered under the name "Prudence Island Historical & Preservation Society" is a publicly supported 501c3 organization. Contributions are tax-deductible.

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On the Internet at: www.prudencehistory.com

Date	Amount \$
For	