

# HISTORICAL NOTES

Volume 22 Issue 1

June 2016

Annual Meeting June 25 at 11:00 am in the Union Church



101 Birds Eye View of Bristol Colony, Prudence Island, R. I.

This post card view published by the Town View Card Company, Portland ME – c. 1940s was sold at The Friendly Store at Sandy Point

## About Bristol Colony *by Joe Bains*

Prior to the start of Bristol Colony, this area of Prudence Island was used primarily for agricultural purposes dating back the mid- seventeenth century. The area also was the site of a colonial era ferry landing called Lawton's Ferry and a 19<sup>th</sup> Century wharf called Bullock's Wharf. Charles. A. Aldrich who purchased this area about 1909, initially called it Grand View and sub-divided the land and sold house lots. It soon came to be called Bristol Colony since so many of the early settlers were from a fishing club in Bristol, RI. The first home at Bristol Colony aka "The Fishing Club" had a prior career as a shed or garage on Constitution Street in Bristol. Frank Dimond, a member of the fishing club, had it brought across the Bay on a barge in 1909. Through the years, the Prudence Island Fishing Club evolved greatly, to become, among other things, a Community of People with a Sense of Pride and Place. In addition to being a great place to go fishing, it has turned out to be a great place for swimming as well. And it has become a place where local children are taught the basic elements of sailing and seamanship

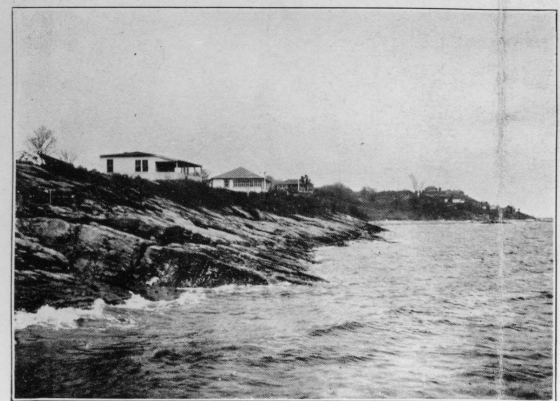
**Bristol Colony In The News** - During the mid-1920s and continuing for a period of time into the 1930s, Prudence Island had its very own summer newspaper, called the "Prudence Island Beacon." The Beacon featured articles of interest to Prudence Islanders, and each issue contained information about every area on the island, including Bristol Colony. Many articles merely described guests of island residents or lists of vacationers staying at island inns, such as the Grand View Inn, at the crest of the hill west of Bristol Colony. Other sources of island news followed, including the "Prudence Island News" in 1947 and the "Prudence Sun" during the 1980s and 1990s.

Below are some excerpts from these news sources featuring "Bristol Colony in the News."

**Prudence Island Beacon – July 16, 1927** – Fishing Club Holds Dinner – On Wednesday noon an informal dinner was given at the Grand View House by Prudence Fishing Club in honor of Theodore Gladding who leaves to spend the summer in Locke Mills, Maine. He will however return in time to enjoy the annual outing of the club which spends several weeks in October and November proving that our bay fishing is not yet a thing of the past.

**Prudence Island Beacon – August 13, 1927** – Horse Shoe Pitching at Grand View – Bullock's wharf that once served the island as a landing for the Providence steamboat, now affords the residents at Grand View a fine cool spot for their favorite game of "Horse Shoes." Here, every afternoon and evening, the tired businessmen relax their weary minds by indulging in this good old fashioned sport.

**Prudence Island Beacon – July 7, 1928** – Grand View. Mr. and Mrs. James Finley of Bristol were guests of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dimond during the week. Mr. and Mrs. Wilmarth Colwell and son William of Providence have spent the week here. Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Bishop and daughter of Sommerville, Mass, arrived today to spend the month. Mr. and Mrs. Roswell Bosworth are entertaining Mrs. Albert C. Ballinger of East Providence and Mr. Charles H. Whipple of Providence.



A strip of rockbound coast skirting the shore at High View Plat

The view above of some waterfront cottages at Bristol Colony dates from about 1930

**Prudence Island Beacon – August 25, 1928** – Grand View Colony (Bristol Colony) Forms Association. Aim Is General Improvement of South End Section. On Monday a movement was started at Grand View by the organization of an Improvement Association. The following officers were elected: President, Frank Dimond; treasurer, Clinton Sherman; secretary, Reginald Dimond; executive committee, Harry Halladay, Herbert Patterson and Wilmarth Colwell.

The purpose of the Association is the clearing up of land and general improvement of conditions at Grand View.

**Prudence Island Beacon – August 25, 1928** – Grand View. Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Mossop of Bristol are spending two weeks here. Guests on Sunday were Lt. Commander and Mrs. Donald C. Godwin of Newport. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dimond entertained at Spring Ledge cottage over the weekend Mr. and Mrs. James Finley and Miss Mildred Pollock of Bristol and Earle Day of Providence.

**Prudence Island News- June 7, 1947** – Editor Robert Greer reported: One thing noticeable about the DeWitt place is its neatness and good taste. Inside the bakery is the neatest and cleanest place I have ever seen. This is just simple reporting, it is not an advertisement.

**Prudence Island News – June 21, 1947** – Editor Robert Greer reported Mrs. Bishop of Malden has opened her summer place with her daughter & granddaughter. And the Day family had arrived last Sunday to take advantage of the summer weather. Editor Greer also suggested if you want a good pie, see Petey DeWitt at the Bakery.

**Prudence Island Telephone Directory – July 1951** – (Advertisement) P.M. DeWitt, Bakery – Pies, Cakes, Fine Baked Goods, Telephone 1-3221.

**Prudence Sun – August 1989** – Prudence Sun Correspondent Eleanor Brown reported that the Bristol Colony Association held its annual meeting and pot luck supper on Saturday, July 8<sup>th</sup>. New officers elected for the year were: Pres. Skip Day, Vice Pres. Marcia Bosworth, Sec. Carol Teague, Treas. Lois Davies.

**Prudence Sun – August 1994** – Sun correspondents Clem & Eleanor Brown reported the Bristol Colony Association held their annual meeting and pot luck supper on July 9<sup>th</sup>. New officers for the year are: Pres. Richard Jenness, VP. Bill Lincoln, Sec. Carol Teague, Treas. Lois Davies. Things have been quiet in the Colony this summer other than the persistent rumor that Providence Mayor Buddy Cianci's yacht was seen moored at a private wharf.

## Prudence Island Vineyards\* - By Judi

*Foster*

In reviewing the history of Prudence Island, one of the more interesting aspects is the discovery of places, structures and activities that flourished on the island at some period and that have now disappeared or changed dramatically. Who would believe that at some point in time the island had sidewalks, casinos, a dance hall, a miniature golf course and a commercial vineyard? This year the Prudence Island Museum is presenting an exhibit on one of these lost enterprises, i.e., Prudence Island Vineyards.

In the early 1970s, three vineyards began in Rhode Island. The first of these was located at Sunset Hill Farm on Prudence Island. It was owned and operated by the Bacon family. In 1972, Natalie and William Bacon gave up a successful family business in Connecticut and moved back to Prudence Island with two of their four children (Nathanael and William Jr.). Previously, the family had spent only their summers and weekends on the island. Nathanael (Nate) went on to become a full partner in the vineyard and William became a teacher in the one-room schoolhouse on the island.

Natalie and her sons were the sixth and seventh generation of Chase family members to live at Sunset Hill Farm.



Nate and Natalie Bacon at the vineyard. 1976.

The Sunset Hill Farm and the farmhouse, located on its 100 acres of land, have a long and rich history on the island. After the British invaded and burnt most homes on the island, John Brown, a Rhode Island merchant, purchased a large portion of island land. He built the farmhouse now located at Sunset Hill Farm in 1783. The land he owned at the time was divided into 3 to 4 farms. The farmland eventually belonged to the Herreshoff family of Bristol, Rhode Island. The Chase family lived on and worked the land as tenant farmers. In 1919, Natalie Chase Bacon's father, Eugene, bought 400 acres of the farmland. At his death in 1960, the land was divided into three parcels that were deeded to Natalie and her two sisters. Natalie received the 100-acre parcel that contained the farmhouse.

Natalie Chase grew up on Prudence Island at the farm. She met William Bacon on the Prudence Island ferry between semesters at Brown and Pembroke. They married in the late 1930s and moved to Woodbury, Connecticut in 1945 where they raised their four children, (Nate, William, Jr., Charles and Martha). When the Bacons decided to move back to Prudence Island, they made the bold and risky decision to establish a commercial vineyard at the farm. At that time, there were no other established vineyards in Rhode Island and the only American wine producing vineyards were located in California and the Finger Lake region of Upstate New York. Despite the unprecedented nature of the venture, William Bacon was optimistic and reasoned that the climate of Prudence Island was similar to the Bordeaux and Burgundy wine-producing regions of France. Also, he believed that the east-facing location of the farmland would protect the grape vines from the strong west wind that could be devastating during the winter months. In his favor was the fact that hybrid varieties of grapes already existed that combined American and French stocks to produce hardy and productive plants for growth in North America.

William and Nate Bacon cleared the land in 1972 and began planting vines in 1973. The family made a \$75,000 investment in the vineyard with expectation that the first yield of wine would take three to four years. The Bacons



concentrated on two classic French wines, Gamay Beaujolais, a red, and Pinot Chardonnay, white. Other experimental vines included red Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Gewurztraminer and Riesling wines.



William Bacon pours grapes into crusher. 1975

In the first year of operation, the Bacons lost a significant number of vines to the deer on the island, which led them to put up more fencing. In order to obtain some income to offset initial losses, the Bacons sold hunting permits for their property. The deer proved to be a problem through the years of operation along with the continuing battle to control the growth of bittersweet and bull brier. At its high point the vineyard covered 16 acres of the farm. The first wines were produced in 1976 and sold mostly on the island and local mainland stores. Harvesting, bottling and labeling the wine became an island community venture with islanders volunteering their service. However, in 1983 the yield of grapes began declining in one area of the vineyard and the decline started to spread gradually throughout the next 5 years. Experts were brought in to diagnose the problem and the conclusion was that an unknown virus was attacking the vines. In 1987, the Bacons made a final effort to reinvigorate growth by drastically cutting back vines. The pruning did not work and the last grapes were harvested in 1988. Bottles of wine could be purchased into the early 1990s.

Today, one can still see the outline of the vineyard at Sunset Hill Farm but no trace of grape vines remain. The three Bacon brothers (Nate, William and Charles) now own the farm in trust. Nate Bacon and his wife Barbara, whom he married in 1982, live at the farm and take care of the house and land.

*\*Material for this article was taken from an interview with Nate & Barbara Bacon and from news reports of Donald Breed, Anne Duffy and Carol Stocker who interviewed William Bacon for the Providence Evening Bulletin, 1973-89)*



Joyce Lower instructs group on internet sources for genealogy research.

## Genealogy Provides Insight Into Prudence Island History - *By Joyce Lower*

Genealogy used to chew up many hours visiting graveyards, town halls, libraries and museums, but since the advent of the internet many of basic searches, such as reviewing city directories, census and death records, can be done on-line. Islanders can now accomplish much of their family research whenever and wherever they choose, instead of timing ferries to the hours of museums or town hall. This on-line research is both a blessing and a curse, because while records are now viewable on-line, many erroneous family trees also clog accurate searches. One of the points of the workshop is to share experiences about evaluating evidence, to avoid inaccuracies.

Brick walls in family research are a common problem: an ancestor who has a common name, or an altogether unique name, but who appears without any evidence of a birthdate and disappears without evidence of death; or a female whose maiden name is unknown. The genealogy workshops have addressed a number of these problems, and discussed alternative ways to look for these uncooperative ancestors. When Donna Bains and John Thresher prepared their 2014 Prudence Park presentation for the Society, they found many families on Prudence are interrelated. Original summer inhabitants of Prudence Park were so related to one another, both by blood and social relationships, that their family lines helped provide a secondary source of verification that the right persons had been found.

In June 2014, Carolyn Pomfret tested the PIHPS genealogy group with her "brick wall" of George Douglass, born about 1747 in North Kingstown, Rhode Island, who married Annis Austin. George Douglass has seemingly always challenged RI researchers. The Douglass problem is compounded by the burning of the town hall in North Kingston, not once but twice, during the 1700s. Since RI town halls are where primary records would be stored, and since there are several Douglass families in early North Kingstown records, this problem has continued to be unsolved. I directed Carolyn to the Douglass family DNA project, and the genealogy workshop attendees await Carolyn's nephews' DNA results, to see if a link can be found to solve this particular brick wall.

Like the development of the internet, modern science may prove to be able to solve genealogical problems long thought to be intractable.

In discussing Carolyn's genealogical enigma, attendees have participated with Carolyn in finding: her Mayflower ancestry through cemetery records; the death of her missing Lawton ancestor, Peter Lawton, through old newspaper records which indicates he died at Cartagena in the midst of Simon Bolivar's determinative 1819 New Grenada victory; her connection to the first island ferry authorized by Rhode Island which ran from the Lawton farm in Portsmouth/Middletown, to the island; and her Douglass family connection to the Sweet family of Prudence Island. The great-grandfather of George Douglass' wife, Annis, came as an infant to Prudence Island in 1664, with his father, James Sweet, who is buried in the old cemetery on the island. It was thought that many of the pre-revolutionary Island families never returned to the island, but George Douglass, whose *family* island lineage went to 1664, farmed on the island and died there in 1823. His son, Parvis Douglass, also farmed on the island with his children attending school on the island, before he removed to Bristol. The Sweet family farm became part of Prudence Park, but Carolyn continues the Sweet line and its connection to the island.

On the opposite end of the immigration spectrum, Theckla Snell came to the genealogy workshop, seeking more information about her Greek-immigrant parents. In reviewing the records of Theckla's parents, the workshop attendees learned about the ending of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish devastation of the city of Smyrna, with its hundreds of years established Greek population. Not only did the attendees review the ship's manifest which showed Theckla's mother travelling, alone, to Philadelphia, with a boatload of other survivors from the burning of Smyrna, but the workshop viewed a newsreel from 1922, which showed the burning of the city, with its refugees marooned on the city piers.

Since 2013, I have moderated the PIHPS genealogy workshops. Because of space limitations in the society's Museum, the workshops are usually limited to 8 participants, and run for about 2 hours. I will be willing to meet for individual consultations at the museum this summer or to give several workshops. I will be available Wednesday, July 6 from 2:00 to 4:00 pm, Tues, July 19 from 10: am to 12:00 ;m and Thursday, July 28, 1:30 to 3:30 pm. Please email [pihpsociety@verizon.net](mailto:pihpsociety@verizon.net) or signup at the museum if you are interested. A small donation to the PIHPS is required for either the workshop or individual sessions.

## **Membership & Donation Form**

The major sources for museum operations and Society activities are memberships and donations. Please take a moment to complete the enclosed 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 with your check today. Membership information is also available at our web site: [www.prudencehistory.com](http://www.prudencehistory.com).

## **Museum Hours**

The Prudence Island History Museum will open Saturday, May 28, 2016 from 12:00 to 2:00 pm. The schedule for the 2016 season is given below.

June, September & October – Saturdays 12:00 to 2:00 pm  
July & August – Saturdays 10: 00 am to 2:00 pm, Tuesdays 1:00 to 3:00 pm

For individual or group visits outside of regular hours email [pihpsociety@verizon.net](mailto:pihpsociety@verizon.net)

## **Mark Your Calendar For Our Annual Meeting!**

# **ANNUAL MEETING**



**Saturday, June 25, 2016  
11:00 am at Union Church  
Joe Bains will speak on  
"Bristol Colony"**

## **Prudence Island Historical & Preservation Society**

<b>Prudence Island Historical &amp; Preservation Society Board Of Directors</b>	
<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>
Judith Ann Foster	President
Paul Collette	Vice President
Donna Bains	Recording Secretary
Priscilla Gill	Correspondence Secretary
Marie Therese Marzullo	Treasurer
Joseph Bains	Historian
Rick Buckley	Archivist
Herb Fuller	Director
Sharon Homan	Director
Jimmy Mosher	Director
Paulina Elser, Theckla Snell, John Thresher	Emeritus Director



# Prudence Island Historical & Preservation Society Membership

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

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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.

US Dept. of the Treasury, Fed. Employer ID# 05-0415854

DUNS # 784730710

On the Internet at: [www.prudencehistory.com](http://www.prudencehistory.com)

Date	Amount \$
For	