

HISTORICAL NOTES

Volume 24 Issue 1

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Annual Meeting June 30 at 11:00 am in the Union Church



Transportation on Prudence Island - How We Got Around. By Joe Bains

Up until the first decade of the 20th Century, transportation on Prudence Island consisted mostly of farmers or innkeepers driving horse-drawn wagons across fields, or along poorly maintained drift-ways. However, this changed significantly with the invention and development of the “horseless carriage,” or automobile. According to Halsey Chase, the first automobile was brought to Prudence Island on the old steamboat, *City of Newport*, about 1909 and was unloaded at the wharf at Prudence Park. It was a Ford belonging to a man named Warren Ballou, who used it to carry the mail between the post office at Prudence Park and Homestead.

By the 1920s there were dozens of automobiles at Prudence and islanders were using them to go just about everywhere on the island. The old Prudence ferry could carry one car at a time across her freight deck, but only when the tide was just right. The tide needed to be high, but not too high, or the car couldn't be loaded or unloaded.

Cars made life at Prudence more convenient, for sure. But there was a down side to cars. One of the first recorded car accidents occurred at the Sandy Point ferry landing in the mid-1920s when a young boy was struck by a car at boat time. Fortunately, he was not seriously injured. Another incident occurred soon after, when Paul Chase acquired a car. He was much more comfortable driving

his horse and wagon, and as he made his way along a drift-way (Now Narragansett Avenue) around Maytum's Point he lost control of the car. Instead of stepping on the brake, he went right over the edge of the road onto the beach, allegedly pulling back on the steering wheel and yelling whoa at the car. By sheer luck, he was uninjured.



Billy Bisordi shows off his "modified" car.

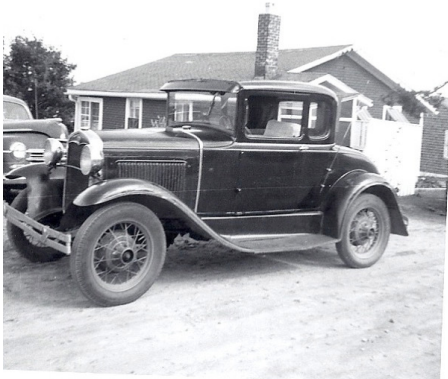
During this time, there were still many islanders without cars which created business opportunities. Nick Herlein owned an old wooden bodied station wagon that he used to transport people between the ferry landings on the east side of the island and Prudence Park. Often, he used kids from the Park, some as young as ten to drive his taxi. Marcy Dunbar, a long time island resident operated a taxi and trucking service from the 1930s into the 1980s.

Todd Farnham, in his book “The Old Days on Prudence,” describes one of the taxi operations from the 1930s & ‘40s.

“Joe Goulet used a variety of automobiles in his long history of operating a Prudence Island taxi. Some of the more notable ones were a Cadillac, a Packard, a Willy's Knight, and of course, the good old Model T. I remember one incident that occurred while Joe was driving the Willy's Knight. The front universal joint let go and the front end of the drive shaft dropped to the ground. The drive shaft caught in the gravel road and acted as a lever raising the back end of the car several feet into the air. This caused much surprise to the passengers in the rear seat, but no one was hurt. The Willy's was quickly brought back down without further damage by being towed backwards with a rope by another vehicle. The universal joint was replaced and Joe was back in business.

At the time, Prudence was noted for its old cars. You could find makes and models now long forgotten, such as Flint, Packard, Gardner, Model T & Model A Fords, Willy's Knight, Franklin (with its air cooled engine), the four cylinder Buick, Moon, Reo, Booth, Chandler, Chalmers, and even the famous Chrysler Airflow (vintage 1932).

During the 1960s & '70s, automobile registration and drivers license requirements were still unheard of, and it was common on Prudence Island to see young men (who most islanders believed had no brains) driving cars with no bodies. These so called "cut-down cars" were quite popular back then. Once a car arrived at Prudence, the salt air would cause the bodies of the cars to start rusting away, the rusted out parts would fall off or be removed, eventually leaving just a frame, seat and a steering wheel. In the absence of any license, insurance and registration requirements, often there were very, very young people driving cars, some as young as 10 to 12 years old. In the 1980s when ferries were put into service that could carry multiple cars on each trip, things changed quickly.



Today, of course, cars, even on Prudence have to be registered, insured, and inspected, and drivers have to be licensed. Old cars are scarce, and it is quite common to see late model vehicles of all types and sizes arriving on the ferry, from Mini Coopers to Humvees, Kias and Audis.



Dick Owen, Billy Silvia, Judi Foster, Rob Porter, Therese Marzullo and Pat Owen Put up the garden fence.

History Of The Community Garden By Judi Foster

In December 1998, Prudence Conservancy agreed to purchase the farm and the second community activity offered was a community garden. The first activity was the annual First Day Walk celebration (January 1999) and the third annual activity was the ice cream social (August 1999).

The garden has come a long way since we drew up the initial plans for the garden space and submitted grant applications to cover the material costs. In March 2000, the New England Grassroots Environment Fund (NEGEF) awarded us funds to set up the garden. A group of island volunteers (Judi Foster, Therese Marzullo, Pat Owen, Rob Porter) led by Dick Owen and assisted by Billy Silvia, laid out and fenced the garden area and built a compost center. Twenty islanders worked the initial 25 plots and planted vegetables and giant pumpkins. Rob Porter provided two steers to keep gardeners company. Eliza Bearse designed and supervised two garden plots for the children of the Island. Anna Levesque established herself as a productive gardener and a dedicated "Garden Boss". The garden committee sponsored three workshops focusing on pest management, composting and seed saving.

The 2001 season was a busy time. Interest in the garden grew and the garden expanded to twenty-eight plots. The Garden Lady and Garden Mole materialized as permanent fixtures. We began a monthly newsletter to keep everyone abreast of garden activities and provide garden tips and humor. Another grant from the NEGEF funded the purchase of a garden shed, lawn mower, weed whacker, hoses and garden tools. Later that summer, Donald Antaya donated the materials for a watering system. Ziggy Bachini, Earl Levesque and Carl Logiudice assisted Donald in installing the system.



J. Westwell addresses gardeners at the Farm House

J Westwell offered a series of workshops for the community covering topics from coping with drought to sex and fertility in the garden. His individual instruction to gardeners continues to be a major educational component of the garden experience. Rob Porter built and placed several birdhouses on the garden fence to attract bluebirds back to the farm.



Judi Foster, Therese Marzullo, Anna Levesque (back row) Ann Marie Lockwood and Peach Warren decorate the garden float.

A group of gardeners (Becky and Rick Cornell, Judi Foster, Anna Levesque, Ann Marie Lockwood, Therese Marzullo, Peach Warren) with Billy Silvia's help, began a tradition of entering a garden float in the July fourth parade.

The climax of the 2001 growing season was a Harvest Festival organized by Jane McGuire, Evie Malm, Becky Cornell and Cynthia Buffum. Gardeners shared their produce, cooking and artistry skills with the Island community. Rick and Becky Cornell entertained the children with garden-related games. Everyone came away a winner!

By the 2002 season, rabbits began multiplying in one of the garden plots although they did not seem to be interested in eating anything. Gardeners had to cope with drought conditions but thanks to mulching tips from J Westwell, our vegetables survived. Joe Bains continued to grow the greatest variety and amount of garden radishes. Everyone who copied J Westwell's cucumber fence failed. Chef Rick Buckley joined the newsletter staff and began supplying us with fantastic recipes timed for specific crop harvesting.

The 2003 season was a year of rain, rot and weeds. Gardeners battled to contain the weeds and give their vegetables a chance. Despite the elements, cucumber and peppers did extraordinarily well while tomatoes went bad. Voles took up occupancy in a number of plots and contributed to some loss of vegetables.

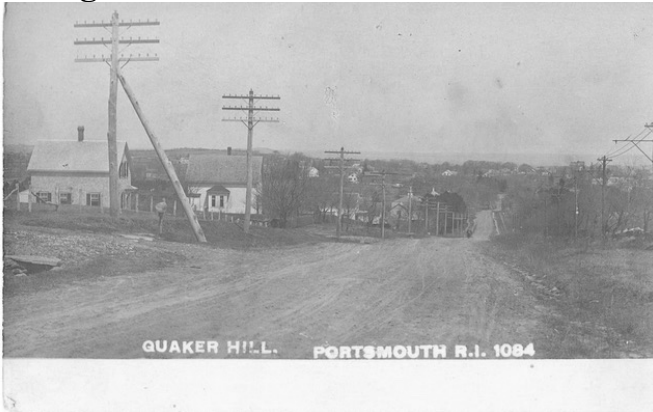


Evie Malm, Jane McGuire, Becky Cornell and Cynthia Buffum organized the first Harvest Festival in 2001.

In the 2004 season, sixty adults and children worked twenty-eight garden plots. One of the major challenges was controlling the voles that had entrenched themselves in tunnels throughout the garden area. The Garden Mole was uncomfortable with this situation as one might expect.

Currently, 18 years after its establishment, the community garden remains a focal point of island activity. During the growing season, Islanders visit the garden to view the vegetables and discuss gardening issues. It has become a fixture on Island tours. Gardeners look forward to discussing their experiences and sharing their gardening secrets. Garden volunteers distribute excess produce to Islanders who are unable to grow their own. Older Islanders often sit by garden plots directing gardeners in the art of planting and just enjoying the experience that the garden setting offers.

Mark Your Calendar For Our Annual Meeting!



A postcard photograph by O.E. Dubois

The guest speaker at our Annual Meeting is Jim Garman who will talk on, **"A View of Portsmouth Through The Eyes of O.E. Dubois 1908-1913"**. O.E. Dubois was a Fall River photographer who traveled from Portsmouth to Tiverton to Westport to Little Compton and elsewhere photographing street scenes and public buildings and even houses. He left us a wonderful view of those towns in the early 20th century.

Jim. Garman is a writer and lecturer of history with a particular emphasis on Newport County history. He was a member of the History Department at Portsmouth Abbey School for 39 years (1965-2004). He has lived on Aquidneck Island since he came here for Navy Officer's Candidate School in 1961. At the Abbey, he taught Russian, Asian and American history and also Photography. He had a second career as a professional photographer. He is a lifelong student of history and he has combined his interests in history and photography. Jim has been a member of the Portsmouth Historical Society since 1974, he was elected its President in 2016 and he continues to serve in that position today.

From The President

By Judi Foster

The 2018 Museum Season features several new exhibits and additions to an older exhibit. They include: Homestead; Homestead Plat Association; "How We Got To Prudence"; "How We Got Around"; and, History of the Island Community Garden.

We hope that you will be able to visit the museum during the 2018 season. Your involvement has made the museum a reality and it is there for your enjoyment.

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.

In order to ensure that islanders have convenient access to the museum exhibits we need volunteer docents. Docents serve as museum tour guides who welcome visitors to the museum and explain the exhibits displayed. You do not have to be an expert in island history to be a museum docent. You simply have to enjoy learning island history and sharing that history with other islanders and island visitors. We encourage anyone interested to contact Priscilla Gill or Sharon Homan for more information.

Workshops At The Museum*

"The Art Of Memoir Writing with Grace McEntee"

Tuesday, July 10 from 1 to 2 pm

"Come Find Your Ancestors" with Joyce Lower

Thursday, July 12 from 1 to 3 pm &

Wednesday, August 8 from 1 to 3 pm

*email Donna Bains at donnabains@gmail.com for reservations

Museum Hours*

June

Saturdays 12 to 2 pm

Sundays 1 to 3 pm

July & August

Saturdays 10 am to 2 pm

Sundays 1 to 3 pm

Tuesdays 1 to 3 pm

September

Saturdays 12 to 2 pm

Sundays 1 to 3 pm

*For individual or group visits outside of regular hours email pihpsociety1983@gmail.com

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