The store was expanded in 1920 and again in 1923. Electrical generators were installed about 1920 and dances were held there every Saturday night during the summer. Tour boats also stopped there so the passengers could enjoy the dances too. On Labor Day weekend 1926, Prudence Islanders enjoyed their first moving picture show there. During this time period the store was operated by Clarence Palmer and Vic Miller. Mr. Miller died in the late 1920s and Mr. Palmer continued to operate the business until his death in 1952.

The building was further enlarged in 1932, when the Alta Vista Dance Hall was moved down from its location on Pier Road and attached to the Casino. Also in 1932, electrical service came to Homestead as Milton Chase erected poles and strung wires sometimes in convenient trees.

The Casino was destroyed in the 1938 Hurricane. Rebuilt and destroyed again in the 1954 Hurricane. Rebuilt again, a store is still located here today, now operated by Lori Cubellis.

As this area developed further, the Homestead Plat Improvement Association was founded early in the 1920s. A building was erected and is still in use today. In the 1950’s bingo games were held there on Saturday nights. Prizes were given out to the winners and I still have a necklace I won at one of the games. In 1923 an annual summer event known as the Ham & Bean Supper was established and is still an annual event. It was held on the lawn at the “Cedars” cottage and moved to the front lawn of the Association’s building a few years later. In the 1980’s due to its popularity among islanders it was moved to the PIA building. The building currently houses a library and children’s activities are held throughout the summer.

The Union Church was founded in 1926 and met at the Homestead Casino until a building could be erected in 1927. More homes have continued to be built over the years in this area as well as many of the original cottages being renovated and enlarged. The Homestead neighborhood still consists of a mixture of seasonal and full-time residents and still keeps its identity as a community. Many of the families residing here now can trace their history back to the original homeowners. It was and is still a wonderful place to grow up. It’s still my neighborhood.

The Union Church Cornerstone
By John C. Thresher [Revised from my speech at the cornerstone rededication on August 7, 2011]

While returning from picking blueberries in July 1926, James McCaughey and Sydney Davidson discussed their desire to have Sunday worship services on Prudence Island. They spread the word and had others do the same. Sydney Davidson conducted that first service at 9:15 on Sunday morning, August 1, 1926 at the Homestead Casino. 97 people were in attendance, sitting on boards placed on top of tonic boxes. The group also voted to organize and eventually build a church. For a couple of years, until the church was built, Victor Miller and Clarence Palmer, the proprietors of the casino, donated the use of the hall from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. The congregation had to be out before the 10:30 ferry arrived. After 90 years, one thing remains the same: To this day, we still aim to conclude the service by 10:00 o’clock.

Later that August, Sydney Davidson was voted the first Chairman, James McCaughey, the first Deacon, Herbert Newman, Secretary, and Thomas Bains, Treasurer. By the end of the season, $660 dollars was raised toward the construction of a building.

There was much progress in 1927: Three offers of land were considered in June, with Rachel Cram’s offer of two lots on Pier Road accepted by unanimous consent, over two offered by Julia Herreshoff at Midway behind the Bridgeview House, and two on Herreshoff Lane by Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Chase. Ground was broken for the church building on July 5, the church was incorporated on July 13, proposed bylaws were accepted on July 17, and Madison Cram presented the deed for the two lots on July 24, as a memorial to his father-in-law Daniel Chase.

The laying of the cornerstone took place on Sunday July 24, 1927. By that time, the piers and sub floor of the church were completed. A platform about 20 feet square was also built
next to the cornerstone to accommodate the people officiating. Victor Miller, one of the trustees of this church, designed the cornerstone. He was a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, and he was an art teacher in the Bristol school system, with the title “Supervisor of Drawing.” He was also a member of St. Albans Lodge No. 6, of Bristol, and the vice president of the Prudence Improvement Association.

The ceremony was quite an elaborate event, with over 700 people attending. The exercises were conducted by the Grand Lodge of Rhode Island, with lodges from Warren, Bristol, and Portsmouth escorting, along with masons from many other lodges attending – about 200 masons in all.

The event actually started in Bristol, where the masons assembled at the Masonic Temple on Hope Street at 2 o’clock. Then, led by the Square Club Band of Providence, they paraded down Church Street and boarded the Prudence for the trip to the island. After landing at Sand Point, they reformed the parade and marched one mile north to the church site.

The ceremony began with the singing of the Star Spangled Banner and The Doric Quartet singing an opening anthem. After a flourish of trumpets, and the reading of the proclamation by Grand Marshal Howard Arnold, Sydney Davidson, the church’s chairman and member of the Paul Revere Lodge in Brockton, Mass., requested the laying of the cornerstone, saying, in part:

“One year ago we asked friends to come and worship with us and now on the first anniversary we take especial pride in having faith enough to ask the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Rhode Island, with Most Worshipful Master Winfield Scott Solomon in charge, to lay the cornerstone of our humble beginning of a monument to God and His Son, Jesus Christ, who died that we might live. Do this in His name and in due form Most Worshipful, and may God’s blessing be with us all.”

Speakers included Major General John A. Lejeune, the Commanding General of the United States Marine Corps, and member of the Overseas Lodge No. 40 of Providence, and Reverend Levi B. Edwards, the Past Master of St. John’s Lodge No. 1 of Providence and the Past Grand Chaplain, and also one of the founders of the Church of the Holy Ghost at Prudence Park. General Lejeune spoke about his induction into the Masonic order. Reverend Edwards spoke about the church as an institution and how he found Masonry exemplified around the world. He also talked about the history of Prudence Island and how his wife was related to the Allen family, one of the earliest settlers on the island.

A box of 20 items was sealed inside the cornerstone. Contents included the Holy Bible, photographs and other memorabilia relating to the church and to Prudence Island, as well as a Lindbergh postage stamp. (Col. Charles A. Lindbergh landed the Spirit of St. Louis at the National Guard airfield at Quonset Point while visiting Providence the previous Thursday, as part of his nationwide tour after he completed the first solo nonstop flight from New York to Paris in May 1927.)

After the ceremony, the ladies of the church entertained the masons with chowder, sandwiches and pie.

The cornerstone was rededicated on August 7, 2011 during the church’s 85th anniversary celebration. Johann Bjurman painted it the day before to highlight its unique indented design: “Union Church 1927” inside a circle and cross, now painted gold with the year in red, all surrounded by dark blue. The artist also painted a gold cross on a blue background on the blank side facing the street.

Sources:
Union Church, Incorporated of Prudence Island: Fiftieth Anniversary Year. 1976, pp. 1-12.

Ceremony for the Laying of the Corner Stone of the Union Church, Prudence Island, R.I., Sunday July 24, 1927. (In a scrapbook, from the collection of Steve Butler.)


Providence Journal July 16, 22, 23 & 25, 1927

Providence Evening Bulletin, July 19 & 25, 1927

From The President
By Judi Foster

It is hard to believe but we are now in our fifth museum season. It seems like yesterday when the renovation to the Coffee Shop was completed and the ribbon was cut to officially open the museum to the public. Since that time we have offered a number of exhibits featuring both events and places important to island history. This year is no exception. Thanks primarily to the effort of Joe Bains, we have four new exhibits covering Homestead, the Union Church, Bay Islands and the schoolhouse. The exhibits will be ready for viewing at our opening the Friday before Memorial Day.

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. Joe Bains, the Society's Historian, will give training sessions for all involved in the docent program. We encourage anyone interested to contact Priscilla Gill or Sharon Homan for more information.

We are asking islanders who are interested in island history to consider becoming a Board Member. We have retirements from the Board coming up this year and would like to bring in new people. If you are interested and would like more information please contact us at pihpsociety1983@gmail.com

**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 on Saturday, May 27, 2017 from 12:00 to 2:00 pm.

The schedule for the 2017 season is given below*.

**June** – Saturdays 12:00 to 2:00 pm

**July, August & September** – Saturdays 10:00 am to 2:00 pm, Tuesdays 1:00 to 3:00 pm & Sundays 1 to 3

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

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

**ANNUAL MEETING**

Saturday, June 24, 2017
11:00 am at Union Church
Joe Bains will speak on "Homestead"

**Prudence Island Historical & Preservation Society**

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