“CHIBACHWESE or CHIBACHUWESET”
The Indian name means something like “place of separation of the passage.” The island was purchased from the Indians by Roger Williams who changed the name to Prudence Island.

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HISTORIC SITES AND POINTS OF INTEREST ON PRUDENCE ISLAND

Prudence Island Light (Sandy Point Light) – Originally built on Goat Island in Newport Harbor by David Melville in 1823, this lighthouse was moved to Sandy Point in 1851. It is the oldest existing lighthouse in Rhode Island. Five people died here during the Hurricane of 1938 when the lighthouse keeper’s house was washed away in the tidal surge. In 2002, the U.S. Coast Guard granted a license to the Prudence Conservancy to maintain the lighthouse tower, mainly due to the efforts of Margaret Del Papa, a Conservancy board member at that time.

Sand Point Coffee Shop – Now the headquarters for the Historical Society, the coffee shop was built in 1955 by Louis and Margaret Del Papa. It was a popular place to get breakfast, lunch and dinner, or just soda, milk shakes and ice cream. Groceries, fresh vegetables and bakery items were also sold. The Del Papas sold the business in the early 1960s after leasing it for a few years. Louis Del Papa, the son of the original owners, eventually purchased the building. His wife, Margaret, was planning to use it for a bakery shop. In 2009, Louis donated the building to the PIHPS in memory of his late wife.

Bullock’s Wharf – Built in the mid-1850s by William P. Bullock, the Providence steamboats landed there until the steamboat wharf was built at Prudence Park in 1874. Afterward, the wharf fell into disrepair, and Daniel Arnold, the owner at the time, had it dismantled.

T-Wharf – The Navy built this large pier when it established the base as an ammunition storage facility during World War II. The base closed in 1972 and eventually became part of the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. The wharf is now used for recreational purposes as well as a place to conduct research and provide educational programs on the bay’s ecology.

Prudence Conservancy Hiking Trails – Prudence Conservancy, through its volunteer “Trail Gang,” maintains several excellent hiking trails, as identified on the map. Be sure to visit the Baker Farm Site, which contains the remains of a colonial era farm. This is on the highest point on Prudence Island, at just over 180 feet. Access is from Broadway, via the Heritage Trail, or from Narragansett Ave. via the Clachrie trail.

Prudence School – The fourth school building on Prudence Island was built in 1896 by Capt. Halsey Chase, its first schoolmaster. It replaced the schoolhouse once located just north of the Baker Farm. The addition containing bathrooms and a kitchen was built in 1954, and a small room was added to that in the 1990s. The school closed from 1981 to 1989, and was closed again in 2009. Now, the non-profit Prudence Island School Foundation leases the building to teach island children in the early grades. The bell, earlier a fog bell at the steamboat wharf depot, came originally from the Davol Mill in Providence.

Farnham Farm – Four generations of the Farnham family farmed this property and raised dairy cattle here until the 1950s (except from about 1907 to 1928). In 1988, the Prudence Conservancy purchased 18 acres of the Farnham Farm (the rest had been sold to the state as open space). The farm now serves as a community center, and offers educational and recreational programs for islanders. Sarah’s Path was developed during the late 1890s, when Edward Farnham, Todd and Harris Farnham’s grandfather, built a multi-story addition on the farmhouse and planned to open a boarding house. The path, designed to link parts of the farm and provide a pleasant stroll for visitors, was named in honor of Edward’s wife Sarah, who had an interest in flowers and trees. It was lined with a variety of shrubs, trees, and flowering plants. The Prudence Conservancy initiated efforts to restore the path in 2003.

Ice Pond (Named Shady Lake by the developers of Prudence Park) – Farmers cut and stored ice from this pond for many years. Nicholas Herlein continued this practice of selling and delivering ice to residents through the 1940s. He eventually moved the ice house from the pond to his store at Sandy Point.

Steamboat Wharf – Built in 1874 by the developers of Prudence Park, the Providence and Newport steamboats stopped here for many years until 1918. A depot with the Prudence Island Post Office was located here for many years.

Stone Bridge on Atlantic Avenue – Probably built in the late 1800s by the developers of Prudence Park; now in disrepair and closed to traffic.

Pavilion Site – Built on the beach in the late 1800s, the pavilion was located near a stream about _mile north of the steamboat wharf. It was an open square building with a paved floor and four stone pillars supporting a hip roof. A winter storm damaged it in 1960; Hurricane Donna destroyed it later that summer.

Division Rock – Was used in a 17th-Century survey as the dividing point between the north and south halves of the island by acreage between Roger Williams and Governor John Winthrop of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Williams owned the northern half of Prudence Island between 1637 and 1639. Later that century, Division Wall was built to mark this division. The wall travels easterly across most of the island, ending at Governor Paine Road. A hiking trail maintained by the Prudence Conservancy’s Trail Gang volunteers follows along the wall.

Chase Way – A parcel of land donated by Barbara Chase Little for public use, with a picnic area, trails, and access to the beach. Limited parking is available.

Pulpit Rock – This natural rock formation is found 200 feet in from the road southwest of Nag Pond, about _mile from Chase Way. One historian believed this was a throne for Narragansett Sachems Canonicus and Miantonomi when they lived on the island around 1637. Roger Williams and Samuel Gorton probably preached to the natives here.

Portsmouth Historical Cemetery No. 41 – The resting place for many of the island’s early inhabitants, this cemetery is located about _mile north of the Homestead ferry landing, near the intersection of Homestead and Alice Avenues. Some inscribed stones date back to the mid-1700s, with earlier burials marked by plain fieldstones. Some Island veterans of the Revolutionary War are buried here.

Indian Spring – This natural spring, enclosed by a circular concrete wall, is located about _mile west of the cemetery, a short distance from Mill Creek. It was used by Native Americans and early settlers and also as a source of water by nearby houses up through the early 1900s.

The Desert – An area of sandy soil and sparse growth about _miles long and _miles wide, located west of the Indian Spring. This was rich farmland in the Colonial era, but years of poor farming practices as well as winds stripped the fine topsoil and exposed the sand underneath. The growing of turf grass in the late 1800s ended the farming completely. Much of the desert is now overgrown with scrub vegetation, briars and pine trees. Mounds scattered around the center of the island are the result of this wind erosion when the dusty soil from the desert collected along objects such as stone walls, rocks, and tree stumps. A few mounds along the Division Trail are quite prominent.

Union Church – Built in 1927. Addition built in 1999 to hold Sunday school classes, and for a heated room to hold services in the winter months. Services are held on Sunday mornings at 9:15.

Our lady of Prudence Chapel – Built in 1925 for the growing Roman Catholic summer population. Mass is at 9:00 on Sunday morning in the summer.