

HISTORICAL NOTES

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HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD SATURDAY, JUNE 29, 2013 AT 11:00 A.M. AT THE UNION CHURCH

From the President

Each generation of islanders leaves behind a lasting imprint of their times. Island history encompasses the landlords, the farmers, the innkeepers, the steamboat and ferry passengers, the conservationists, the storekeepers and the families that have populated the island since 1637. Some things have changed dramatically others have not. As noted author and historian David McCullough wrote, "History is who we are and why we are the way we are." Truly, the ability to view our past shapes our future and keeps alive the roots and foundation of an island culture that began 376 years ago.

This coming summer season marks the opening of the Prudence Island Historical Museum that is dedicated to preserving, interpreting, and promoting the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Prudence Island. The mission of the museum is to maintain and expand a collection of historic artifacts, manuscripts, photographs, and printed material relating to the history of Prudence Island; disseminate information through research, publications, exhibitions, and public programs; and to foster an appreciation and understanding of local island history in audiences of all ages.

After almost three years of fundraising and renovating the Prudence Island Historical Museum will open to the public over the Memorial Day Weekend (10am -2pm, Sat., Sun. & Mon). For the Board of Directors the journey of transforming the Sand Point Coffee Shop into a museum has been a series of challenges ranging from meeting state and local regulations, solving construction problems and arranging deliveries of equipment and furniture to the island. Now comes the fun part – sharing our collections with the island community. For the 2013 summer season, the museum features six exhibits. 1. *Island Hurricanes*; 2. *Prudence Ferries*; 3. *Prudence Island Lighthouse*; 4. *Island Organizations*; 5. *Island Basket Weaving*; and, 6. *Prudence Island Postcards*. The dates and times for museum operation will depend on the number and availability of volunteers to staff the museum. Please visit our website at prudencehistory.com to view the docent application.

The Board of Directors thanks all of the islanders who have given of their time and support to make our history available. We hope to see you at the museum. **Judi Foster**



Indirect Recollections of the 1954 Hurricane

I have lived through several major hurricanes that caused lots of damage in Rhode Island—storms that come to mind are: Hurricane Gloria in September 1985, Bob in August 1991, Irene in August 2011 and the most recent one, Sandy just before Halloween in 2012. These, from what I've read and heard others recall, pale in comparison to the destruction caused by the hurricanes of 1938, 1944 or 1954.

These storms occurred before I was born, so I have to rely on the recollections of other people, as well as old newspaper articles and other historical accounts. My grandparents, parents and aunts and uncles, as well as other people who remembered, told such stories over the years, and some of these, relating to Prudence Island, I'll attempt to recall and pass along (thus my "indirect recollections," to perhaps, but hopefully not, coin a phrase).

Because the 1938 hurricane hit on September 21, my father's family had already closed up the cottage and were back in Pawtucket. My mom, who also lived in Pawtucket at that time, did not come to Prudence Island until she met my father a few years before they were married in July

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1954. Both remember being let out of school in 1938 just as the storm was really picking up, and running home quite scared, with wind blowing and trees coming down behind them.

My grandfather, Clifford Thresher, Sr., worked for the telephone company, so he was away from home weeks at a time, with many others working to restore telephone service.

In 1954, Hurricane Carol hit on August 31. My grandma, Phebe, and her daughter, Betty Hayes and grandson Bobby, were the only ones staying on Prudence that day. Grandpa and Uncle Bob Hayes were working that day. My parents, Clifford, Jr., and Bette, were also working: my father ended up being marooned in downtown Providence due to the flooding from the storm surge, and mom worked at Times Square Pharmacy, her grandfather's store in Pawtucket.

Mom told me that her favorite radio station at that time, WHIM, had been warning about the hurricane and had accurately predicted when the storm would hit that day. But, my father and grandfather ignored her and went to work anyway.

That day, as I remember Aunt Betty or Grandma tell, when the storm was at its peak, the wind was actually lifting the living room end of the house off the pilings. This end of the house was (and still is) the highest part off the ground, about 2½ feet (the house was on a slight incline at the top of the hill, no cellar or enclosed foundation, just square concrete footings). Luckily, the force of the wind was not enough to push the house off of the footings, but it was forceful enough to blow underneath and lift it up and down. By then, Grandma and Aunt Betty had gotten out of the living room; Aunt Betty had bags packed, ready to run over to Arthur and Madeleine Bearse's house next door. Also, a branch from one of the trees came down and broke one of the living room windows.

Being about 40 feet uphill from the bay, the house escaped any damage from the storm surge. The tide had flooded across Narragansett Avenue into the yards, even knocking the Apps' cottage off its footings and causing the roof to collapse (perhaps others, too, but that's the only one I remember hearing about in my immediate neighborhood).

Of course, I've heard and seen pictures of the total destruction of the houses and of The Friendly Store at Sand Point and Clarence Palmer's store at Homestead.

The ferry was able to resume service soon after the hurricane: Captain Herzig and his crew were able to ride out the storm in Bristol Harbor, managing to keep sailing in the leeward side of Hog Island, thus saving the Prudence from being washed ashore as it was in 1938. At that time, the storm surge had taken it from its dock in Bristol and washed it onto the Seth Paul Company's dock near State Street.

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Hurricane Carol also destroyed the docks at Homestead and Sand Point. Ferry service resumed soon afterward; however, people had to climb onto skiffs to get to shore. At Homestead, the storm surge not only took off planks and railings, but also lifted the middle of the dock so it resembled an arch bridge.

People were able to fix up the dock with salvaged lumber just enough to allow the ferry to dock there and discharge and receive passengers until it could be rebuilt. My uncle, Bob Hayes described how he, my father, and Oscar Sands, among others, worked to reinforce and tie down parts of the dock, because they were worried about Hurricane Edna, which was expected to come up the coast soon, following a similar route as Carol. Unfortunately, he is no longer alive to tell the story, as he was able to relate many details in quite an interesting manner, which unfortunately I don't remember now. **John C. Thresher**

Remembrances of Hurricane Carol

Hurricane Carol seemed to cover the island like a great beast, and with something so huge we only really experience what is right in front of us.

I was nine years old in the summer of '54, and without Googling or other fact checking these are some of my memories.

The night before, a group of us were playing at the Goff's house and the Crow's nest. As it got dark, Mrs. Goff came out and told us we'd better go home – there was a big storm coming tomorrow and families would need to prepare.

My sister, Mary, and I walked downhill with the other kids all talking with anticipation about the big storm. We were excited.

The next morning I woke up to my grandfather's voice. This was unusual because Gramp was close to eighty and, I thought, usually pretty calm. But he knew hurricanes and the radio said this one was huge and coming fast. At first it was grey and spitting rain. He directed us to fill whatever containers we could find with water (there was no bathtub in the summer house). Then to help make sandwiches and get boxes ready in the cellar for milk and cold stuff for when the electricity failed. (no insulated coolers either, so we wrapped things in newspaper.)

Now it was getting very dark, with a yellowish tinge and the bay and the clouds were whipping. Grandpa Salisbury's house is halfway up against the hill right above Sand Point dock – too high to worry about flooding I figured; but the wind started screaming then and the slashing rain made it hard to see outside.

Grandpa ordered the windows to be cracked open on the side opposite the prevailing wind. Something about relieving the pressure so they wouldn't blow out.

Mary and I looked at each other; this was getting serious. We kids stayed at Prudence every summer but

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my parents were in the city with our younger brothers and sisters. For the first time I started worrying about them.

Grownups and children were now lined up at the front windows trying to see out. Mrs. Rice lived alone across the street right next to the shore. Suddenly the door to her little cottage flew open and she started out and up the hill. Aunt Tudy ran out to get her and they struggled back to our house. Old Mrs. Rice was frightened. "It's so bad! Those houses will go – the wind sounded like a freight train – Oh God, I hope everyone else is safe!"

Watching helplessly I realized now, everyone was at the mercy of this hurricane. Then the wind started to drop and a weak sun appeared. We clampered to go outside amazed and secretly relieved.

"No, No, It's just the eye, Ruthie, close those windows and open the other side."

But we sneaked downstairs and outside and looked with awe at the perfect circle of clear sky surrounded by ragged black clouds. The whole of it was moving fast and we felt the wind rise and the sky blacken again as the clearing raced away from us. Now it seemed more ominous and furious than before. Grandpa said the wind was coming from a different direction now and would be worse. And it was.

First Grant's house seemed to wobble; or was it the distortion of the rainy windows? But then it began to shift on its foundation as surf crashed around it.

I knew the three kids, our playmates, and their parents weren't there but as the whole house sagged and disappeared under the waves I felt the storm and the world was turning against us and the island.

Saul's store was next. (or maybe first actually - my memory here is spotty.) We watched the hungry water again crash around it, but then the grownups groaned out loud, "there it goes – God help them!" (though no one lived there)

It was the wind. The roof of the Recreation h

Hall lifted like a wing, graceful for a moment than smashing down and lost from sight under the surf, and the rest of the store soon followed.

The Winn and McEntee cottages were right behind them and now there was no more yard – just the wreckage and the sea; and the Homan's. Charlie Homan had just built his summer cottage. It was in front of Nana Homan's house and in terrible danger too. Again I listened to the adult voices but they were almost in whispers. Nana's father, Mr. Thompson, along with the Gustavis family, had lost their lives right there just 16 years ago in the '38 hurricane. We had watched Mrs. Homan and her boys make their way up to the grandparent's house – but that didn't appear much safer with waves crashing around the lighthouse and all the point obliterated. For the first time I realized there was no dock either. Probably gone long before the houses even came down.

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Tree branches and roof shingles flew by and the wind screamed on. I was told to pray for all the people in danger. Aunt Tudy was saying her rosary...and at last the noise and the rain started to lessen.

For us, at that time, Prudence especially Sand Point, would never be the same. It was a painful and anxious time on Prudence, but for my friends and I even the aftermath of the storm seemed an adventure.

In the old Reo, with the rumble seat and running boards filled, Aunt Tudy drove to Homestead, or as far as we could get anyway. The Casino was gone and the pier a twisted wreckage where the ferry couldn't land. No phones worked – few of us had one anyway – and with electricity gone, we had no news at all about the mainland. But somehow the ferry made it to us that evening. I remember the road filled with people waving and wiping tears as she came around the Point. My Aunt Honey was on it and she said it was the same on the boat, with men and women in tears and gasping as they took in the devastation. But as they landed and learned no lives were lost or other homes destroyed, the mood was joyful as families reunited.

As for the Point kids, we had spent hours rather unsupervised as the grownups were so busy. We explored the wrecked store and found five-gallon tubs of ice cream, only a little salty and melted, and went to work gleefully with the little wooden spoons also found in the mess. The big boys were swimming in the lake formed around the lighthouse and jumping off the little roof over the entrance door. It was a wonder no one was injured. Only the arrival of the Kaiman family, Saul and Evelyn and their two girls, who sadly walked around the remains of the store and their livelihood, made us reflect on the loss and hardship the hurricane brought to Prudence.

None of us had families hurt in the city I heard; but there was terrible property loss and a slow recovery.

The Red Cross arrived on Prudence after a day or two. They brought tankers of water and food for those who needed it, and they helped get a new home built for the Grant family on Narragansett Avenue.

We were all back in school on the mainland when my aunt told us the youngest Homan boy was hospitalized with what they thought was typhoid – probably from contaminated ice cream.

Mr. Kaiman and his family moved to the mainland. Prudence lost its schoolteacher but Saul became an editor at the Bristol Phoenix newspaper. The Homan boy recovered and we've been married for more than forty years.

Probably there are as many memories of Hurricane Carol on Prudence as there were people on the island that day – all with different impressions and probably better facts. But for everyone who remembers, the history and resilience of the island during that time will always be something to cherish. **Sharon Naughton Homan**

Historian's Corner. "Maytum's Lost Manuscripts"

Many Prudence Islanders are familiar with the name Charles G. Maytum and the book that he wrote, "Paragraphs on Early Prudence Island." In 1964, the book was published in a limited edition of forty copies which Mr. Maytum sold to his neighbors and friends on Prudence Island. A 2nd printing of the book was done in 1976, which was limited to 300 copies. Today, the book is out of print, and much prized by those fortunate enough to have a copy. A recent internet search revealed five copies available for sale, at prices ranging from \$98 to \$325. Very few Islanders are aware that Mr. Maytum continued to write about Prudence Island after his book was published. Between 1964 and 1978 he produced four short works about Prudence. It is certain that Mr. Maytum wanted to make these available to Prudence Islanders, but did not have the means to publish them. Instead, he donated the original manuscripts to the Rhode Island Historical Society (RIHS) Library. During the 1990s, with the permission of RIHS Library staff, I was able to make a copy of each manuscript, hoping in the future to make copies available. The title of each manuscript is provided below along with a brief excerpt from the "The James A. Garland Mansion on Prudence Island."

- "Early Wharves of Prudence Island"
- "Division Rock – West Shore of Prudence Island"
- "Records of Sandy Point Lighthouse on Prudence Island"
- "The James A. Garland Mansion on Prudence Island"

"The story has been told that Mr. Garland with a party of friends were making a trip from Providence to Newport late in the fall of 1904. Encountering an unusually heavy sea and the wind reaching almost a hurricane velocity, the captain of the Barracuda was having trouble with the engine and advised Mr. Garland to anchor in Potter's Cove while repairs were being made to the engine. After viewing the scenery from his yacht, Mr. Garland was impressed with the serenity and loneliness of the locale and immediately made plans to purchase the entire north end of the island and build a home there." **Joe Bains**

From The Archives

It's here, the long awaited Prudence Island event of the season! Memorial Day 2013 marks the grand opening of the Prudence Island Museum. It's been a very busy winter in the Archive room and we are finally finished! It is now a securely locked, environmentally controlled room. Shelves are in, and our present collections are in place. Now the real work begins. We are going through the entire collection to document and catalog every single piece. To make the task manageable, the society has purchased PastPerfect software, a world's leader in

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collection and contact management software for small to midsize museums like ours. This software will allow us to access, catalog and track that box of island memorabilia from the moment you bring it in our door. It then will be properly preserved and stored in our archive room. The software will compose thank you letters and 'letters of deeds' for donations, track fund-raising projects, patrons, donors, and volunteers. In addition to the "housekeeping features" is a Web publishing export tool that allows us select the catalog records, images and fields that we want to publish online, building a fully searchable, collections-based website. Think of it, exploring the history of our island from the comfort of your home or anywhere on your smart phone. The software and associated computer hardware were made possible by grants for the Rhode Island Foundation ADD Fund and Twin River Casino, along with generous donations from our members – Russ and Linda Sattler and Judi Foster. I'd like to thank them all for their generosity.

Some of our collection donations have come from far away. Recently our President, Judi Foster, received an email from a gentleman from Washington State, Lee Crowthers. He reached out to Bob Stankelis (NBRR) via email. Bob forwarded the email to Judi, who forwarded it to me. It seems that Mr. Crowthers' mother (Helen Vose Aldrich Crowthers) had connections to the island. Helen's parents Charles and Ada Aldrich owned the Grand View Hotel on Broadway. Charles' father, Isaac Aldrich, was the lighthouse keeper (1875-1886). Charles was also one of the founding fathers of the Prudence Island Navigational Company (1921) and childhood playmate of Halsey Chase.

So after a number of very pleasant emails with Mr. Crowthers, he told me he wanted to offer to the Society copies of photographs and documentation of his ancestry. In addition, he had an early painting of the Prudence Island Lighthouse. The painting appears to be early 19th century pre-1938 hurricane and possible pre-1927 (no Mt Hope Bridge in background). The signature looks to be "Donie" (not sure on spelling). Does that name ring a bell with anyone? If so, please contact me at the museum. What a great donation for our lighthouse exhibit and just in time for our grand opening. Come and take a look for yourself Memorial Day Weekend.

Other donations are from closer to home. Recently, Jane Aldrich Kane Mason reached out to me via Facebook. She explained that she had a box of island memorabilia that her sister Betsy Aldrich Porter had left with her before heading to Florida. The box was a collection of items that Betsy's husband Craig and his father had collected over the years. After doing a quick survey, I found that it contained numerous newspaper articles about the island, correspondence from the Prudence Utility Corporation and a reel to reel audio tape. The inscription on the audio tape box indicates the tape is a 1968 recording of Mrs. Gladys Williams Hamm

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recounting the history of Prudence Island. A quick check with one of my island historians told me that Mrs. Hamm lived in Prudence Park and was a descendent of Roger Williams. Now all we need is a reel to reel tape recorder to listen to the recording. If you know of one, please contact me. I am very excited about what possible recounting of island life she might have had. I will be digitizing the recording and making it available to everyone in the future.

The Society's Board of Directors is really excited about the opening of the museum. We are proud to be able to provide a place that will safely store and protect our island history. Also, we are looking forward to being able to display these treasures to visitors of the museum. While the Society currently has a number of items, we are always looking to expand our collection. We welcome donations of island artifacts. These artifacts might be audio tapes, paintings, photographs, diaries, personal letters, postcards, early minutes of the various island organizations, ferry schedules and more. So check your attics, closets, and cellars, you never know what you might find. Please stop on by and share one of your stories or maybe even learn something new about the little island we all love. **Rick Buckley**

Annual Meeting – Saturday June 29th at the Union Church, 11:00 AM

Please join us for our annual meeting on June 29th at the Union Church. The Annual Meeting will be held Saturday, June 29, 2013 at the Union Church from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm. Our guest speaker is Jim Karpeichik who is the Director of Ocean State Video. Mr. Karpeichik has over 25 years of experience with video production. His work has appeared on NBC Nightly News, Discovery Channel, PBS, CNN, History Channel, ESPN, TNT, Fox Sports Network, CBC, C-SPAN, Entertainment Tonight and numerous television stations across the country including WJAR in Providence, RI where he worked for 14 years, 9 as Chief Photographer. Other production experience includes documentaries, corporate video presentations, commercials, educational programs, industrial training videos and music promotional DVDs. Among Mr. Karpeichik's documentaries is "Rhode Island's Historic Lighthouses" in which Marge DelPapa is interviewed about the Prudence Island Lighthouse and 1938 Hurricane. We are now collecting photos of Prudence Islanders from the 1990s for viewing at the meeting. Email digitized photos to pihpsociety@verzon.net or give to Judi Foster for scanning.

Annual Meeting Agenda

- Secretary & Treasurer Reports
- Election of Officers
- Old & New Business

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Guest Speaker, Jim Karpeichik
Quilt Raffle Drawing
Video Presentations from the 1990's

Dues Reminder

Please take a moment to complete the enclosed 2013 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.

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