

Points of Interest - Prudence Island is rich in history, both cultural and natural. The island has changed dramatically over the last few centuries and been witness to everything from tenant farming to British soldiers during the Revolutionary War to a thriving resort community. Below are a few of the highlights to look for as you explore the island, which we hope will enrich your visit.

NBNERR Lab & Learning Center - The NBNERR headquarters are a great place to familiarize yourself with the island, including the Reserve's ongoing research and stewardship projects. Our lab and learning center offers opportunities to learn about island wildlife with educational displays and hands-on activities. During the summer months, the Estuary Education Shed (located at the base of the T-wharf) is open to visitors. Inside you will find a touch tank and several aquariums, stocked with critters from the Bay, as well as fun activities for the kids. As you explore the island, you are likely to see signs of our restoration projects, which include the removal of invasive species (European larch, phragmites, autumn olive), controlled burning of pine barrens habitat and maintaining areas as coastal grasslands.

Farnham Farm - Farnham Farm was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2006, recognized for its significance as the last working farm on Prudence Island when it ceased operating in the 1950's. Farming first began here in the mid-1600's and continued until the British burned the area during the Revolutionary War; farming resumed again in the early 1800's. The Farnham family worked this land from the 1860's until the 1950's, operating a dairy farm as well as growing corn, fruits and vegetables. Today, the Farnham Farm land is owned by the Prudence Conservancy and is operated by the Farnham Farm Trustees. Community members take great care to maintain garden plots, a blueberry patch and a small vineyard. The beautiful ginkgo tree growing in front of the farmhouse was planted in the 1880's, brought over as a seedling from a ship's captain as a gift to Sarah Farnham.



Prudence Island Schoolhouse - Built in 1896 by Captain Halsey Chase, the Prudence Island School is the last functional one-room schoolhouse in Rhode Island. It was the fourth schoolhouse built on Prudence Island, replacing one that used to stand north of the Baker Farm site. The school was closed from 1981-1989 but has otherwise remained active for over 100 years. They operate under a home-school model with student ages ranging from pre-kindergarten through high school. Only a handful of students attend the school now, but many island residents remember going to school here. An addition to include bathrooms and a kitchen was built in 1954, with another small room added in the 1990's. The bell, originally a fog bell, was donated by George Williams, an island resident at the time and descendent of Roger Williams.

Prudence Park (Stone Wharf) - The wharf at this site dates back to the establishment of a summer resort community, Prudence Park, in 1875. Regular steamship service operated from Providence to Newport until 1918, and the lure of escaping the summer heat of the city brought many people to Prudence Island. It was soon a thriving resort village, complete with inns, a casino, gas streetlights and a bathing pavilion.

From here you can see Hope Island to the west, another island managed by NBNERR; it is a significant nesting site for several species of wading birds, and for this reason is off limits during the spring and summer months.

Division Wall - In the mid 1630's, a large boulder (Division Rock) was used as a survey point to divide the island in half, with Roger Williams owning the northern half and Governor John Winthrop owning the southern half. Approximately fifty years later, Benjamin Browne requested that his land be surveyed so that he could determine the exact boundary location of his property on the south end of the island. The surveyors began a line at Division Rock that ran east until nearly reaching the shore, subsequently dividing the island in half. There is a beautiful well-maintained trail that runs the length of what is now known as Division Wall.