United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM  

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name  Farnham Farm

other names/site number  Dennis Farm

2. Location

street & number  0113 Mount Pleasant Avenue  □ not for publication

city or town  Portsmouth  □ vicinity

state  Rhode Island  code  RI  county  Newport  code  005  zip code  02872

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this □ nomination  
□ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property

□ meets □ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant

□ nationally □ statewide □ locally. (□ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title  Date

Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property □ meets □ does not meet the National Register criteria. (□ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title  Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:  
□ entered in the National Register  
□ See continuation sheet  

□ determined eligible for the National Register  
□ See continuation sheet.

□ determined not eligible for the National Register  
□ See continuation sheet.

□ removed from the National Register.  
□ See continuation sheet.

□ other (explain)
5. Classification

<table>
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<th>Category of Property</th>
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<td>Noncontributing buildings:</td>
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<td>site</td>
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Name of related multiple property listings
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Name of related multiple property listings: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

6. Function or Use

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<td>LANDSCAPE: conservation area</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGRICULTURE: processing</td>
<td>AGRICULTURE: agricultural field</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGRICULTURE: storage</td>
<td>SOCIAL: civic</td>
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<td>AGRICULTURE: animal facility</td>
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<td>AGRICULTURE: agricultural outbuilding</td>
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7. Description

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Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)
8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark “x” in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ B removed from its original location.

☐ C a birthplace or grave.

☐ D a cemetery.

☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ F a commemorative property.

☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

AGRICULTURE

Period of Significance
1805–1954

Significant Dates
1805- initial construction of farmhouse and barn
1869- purchase of farm by Edward Farnham
1872, 1898- additions of east and west wings to farmhouse

Significant Person
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
undefined

Architect/Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Primary location of additional data:

☐ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State Agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other

Name of repository
Prudence Island Historical and Preservation Society, Inc.
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 18.38 acres

UTM References
(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing
1 119 306 248 460 779 4 3 19 306 439 460 791 4
2 119 306 383 460 776 7 4 19 306 641 460 784 9

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Judith Ann Foster
organization Prudence Conservancy date April 5, 2005
street & number 0113 Mount Pleasant Avenue telephone 401 683-4838
city or town Prudence Island state Rhode Island zip code 02872

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property’s location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items
(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner
(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Prudence Conservancy
street & number 0113 Mount Pleasant Avenue telephone 401 683-4838
city or town Prudence Island state Rhode Island zip code 02872

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127, and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.
DESCRIPTION

Farnum Farm is a small agricultural complex located on Prudence Island in Narragansett Bay. Farnum Farm includes about 18.5 acres of cleared land, a small group of buildings (house, barn, milk house) arranged around a central yard, some fields used as pasture, a fenced garden, a small woodlot, a small orchard, a landscaped path, and stone walls.

The Farnum Farm buildings are simple, vernacular structures built over the course of the nineteenth century. The house was constructed in three sections; its rear elevation faces north across the farmyard to a long barn oriented east–west and also constructed in successive stages. A small milk house is set west of the house and south of the barn. The farmyard is reached by a short dirt road off Mount Pleasant Avenue, one of three major north-south routes on Prudence Island.

House (c1805, c1872, 1898)

The Farnum House consists of a small, one-and-one-half-story, flank-gable-roof center section (c1805) with taller additions at each of its gable ends. On the east gable end is a two-story, hip-roof addition (c1872); on the west gable end is a two-story, gable-roof addition (1898). Both additions are set well back from the plane of the principal elevation.

The center section of the house is 4 bays wide on its south (front) elevation; the north (rear) elevation is 3 bays wide. There is a small, interior, brick chimney. The entrance is set roughly in the center of the façade, flanked by two window openings on the west side, and a single window on the east side. There is also a center entrance on the north (rear) elevation, facing the farmyard. This entrance is now obscured by an added vestibule. Cedar shingles cover the south and west walls, and vinyl siding covers the north and east sides. The foundation is rubblestone; there is a full-height cellar. The frame is of dimensional lumber; rafters, joists, and studs are fastened with cut iron nails.

The exterior trim of the center section is plain. Simple board frames surround the windows and doors. Most of the sash is original, six-over-six, double-hung, wood sash. The entrance has a replacement steel door and an aluminum storm door.

The plan of the house’s center section appears to be unaltered. The house is roughly square, and its ground floor is divided into quadrants—two front chambers, a kitchen in the northeast corner, and a stair and a small room (now a bathroom) in the northwest corner. There is no stairhall—the entrance opens directly into a front room. The stair is a simple straight run and leads to an open, unfinished space under the roof.
The interior finishes of the center section are plain. The walls and ceilings are plaster-and-lath. Floors are random-width boards; some are also covered in linoleum. The corner posts are cased. There is a molded chair rail and a narrow cornice molding in the front rooms. There are four-panel doors with old thumb latches. The rear kitchen has a fireplace with a plain mantel shelf, vertical board wainscot, and a small, built-in storage pantry and dish cupboards.

The east section of the house was constructed circa 1872. It is a plain, two-story structure, square in plan, with a hip roof and a later vestibule added to its rear elevation. There is a single room on each floor. There is a modern sink on the first floor and an unfinished room on the second floor. The windows are replacements—casements on the first floor, three-over-one, double-hung sash on the second. The cedar shingles on the exterior walls are now covered with vinyl siding. During the 1930s, the first floor was used as a winter milk house because the addition was unheated.

The west section of the house was built in 1898. When constructed, it was a full 3 stories high; in the 1950s, its gable roof was lowered to the present two-story height. It is sheathed with vinyl siding. There is a single-story, shed-roof porch with plain posts on the south elevation. The windows have replacement sash. Larger than the east section, the west addition is also square in plan. The entrance is through a door at the east end of the porch, which opens into a narrow stairhall with a winding stair to the second floor. The interior is a single room on both floors, apart from some built-in closets and cupboards. This addition was constructed when boardinghouses and inns were increasingly popular on Prudence Island—the Farnhams apparently intended the west addition for rental to summer visitors, but they do not seem to have actually used it for that purpose. At present the first floor houses the office of the Prudence Conservancy and a modern bathroom; the second floor space has a bedroom-kitchen studio.

With its two large additions, the farmhouse now has 2,850 square feet of space.

Barn

The barn is located at the north side of the farmyard. It is a long, narrow building with a flank gable roof, oriented east-west, its doors opening to the south. The barn appears to be the product of several accretive changes made over two centuries—there are three main sections and many small adaptive changes.

The center section is the oldest part of the barn—it may date to the 1850s and probably replaced the first barn on the property. This section has two levels. Its north wall is rubblestone on the first level and board-and-batten above; cedar shingles cover the other walls. The center section is framed of heavy timbers with mortise
and tenon joints. On the south elevation are two, large, barn doors, one at each level, a pedestrian door, and several small windows, now filled with replacement casement sash.

The western addition probably dates from the 1880s and was designed as a dairy barn. Like the center section, it is two full stories high, with a milking room on the ground level and hayloft above. Built with a balloon frame, the west end has a rubblestone ground level, with shingles and clapboards above. The long southern slope of the roof has been extended forward, and the southern elevation now has five sets of double doors that allow the entire ground level to be opened to the southern sun and light. The barn was designed for a hand-milking operation—several stanchions for tethering cows remain in place.

The east addition to the barn, which may be contemporary with the dairy addition on the west end, is a single level with a loft above. Its southern elevation has a single pedestrian entrance at the west end and a double-leaf entrance at the east end. This section of the barn was renovated in the past five years to serve as a community learning center. The roof, frame, and chimney were retained, but the wall covering was replaced on the north, east, and south elevations. This section of the barn now has a concrete floor and modern windows and is outfitted with a small kitchen and bathrooms.

The barn was used in the mid-twentieth century to house Prudence Island's road maintenance vehicles and fire engines. It also housed an auto repair shop.

**Milk House**

The milk house is a small, parged rubblestone building with a gable roof of corrugated metal. There is a single window on each elevation, a single-leaf door on the south side, and an access panel to the lower level on the east side. The milk house likely dates from the turn of the twentieth century, when concern for the hygiene of milk in dairies was an important issue.

The lower level of the milk house contains a large tank designed to hold large cans of milk until they were picked up. A pump (no longer extant) filled the tank with cold water from a well; a pipe at the upper level of the tank drained off the warmed water and allowed the tank to refill from the well.

During the 1940s, the ground floor of the milk house was a print shop; Prudence Island's newspaper was printed here. In the 1950s, the milk house became a barbershop and a musical instrument-making shop.
Landscape Features

The main entrance to the Farnham Farm is a dirt road off Mount Pleasant Avenue. The road is approximately 362' long and is framed by woodlands on the north side and an open, partially-fenced field on the south. A short, low, dry-laid stone wall runs from the southwest corner of the barn to this road and marks the entry to the farmyard. Running perpendicular to the dirt road on its south side is a tree-lined track called Sarah's Path, named for Sarah Farnham, who lived in the house from the 1870s through the 1900s. A modern gazebo is located on the path.

The path was originally lined with trees, shrubs, and flowering plants. It was designed as a pleasant passage between two orchards and as a stroll for summer guests. Much of the planting has disappeared, but the path is still lined by Norway spruce, sycamores, maples, a black locust, and catalpa trees. The Prudence Conservancy is now making plans to restore the plantings of Sarah's Path.

On the north side of the farmhouse, a rail fence passes from the milk house along the rear of the house. On the south side of the house, post-and-wire fences enclose gardens and a small pasture. There is a small apple orchard. Much of the rest of the land is kept open, but there is a small woodlot at the east edge of the farm property.

An unusually large gingko tree shades much of the farmyard. Planted in the 1880s, this specimen was a gift to Sarah Farnham from a traveling friend.

There is a well in the farmyard, now covered with a large stone slab.
SIGNIFICANCE

Farnham Farm is significant as a rare surviving example of agricultural life in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on Prudence Island. The farm encompasses several of the historic elements of an island farmstead, including house, barn, milk house, fields, garden, woodland, orchard, and stone walls. Farnham Farm is the last remaining working historic farmstead on Prudence Island and is an important document in Rhode Island and Prudence Island agricultural history.

The current farm property is smaller than it was historically, but the farm is still well over 18 acres and retains much of the aspect of the complete farm. The buildings of Farnham Farm have been altered through time, a reflection of their long history of usefulness to a farming family. However, they retain sufficient integrity to document their significance. In their physical relationship, they convey the image of the small family farm, with its house and outbuildings surrounding a yard, and in turn surrounded by fields.

Prudence Island Agriculture

The settlement of Prudence Island began in the mid-seventeenth century, shortly after the island was purchased from the Narragansetts by Roger Williams and John Winthrop, of Boston, in 1637. In 1647, Prudence and nearby Patience Islands became part of the town of Portsmouth. During its first century of development, Prudence was largely owned by absentee landlords (especially from Boston and Salem) who rented the island’s farmlands to tenants. The island was particularly suitable for agriculture, especially animal husbandry, because it sat in a strategic location as trade expanded among the towns surrounding Narragansett Bay.

In the mid-eighteenth century, much of the land passed from Massachusetts merchants to island and Newport families. The 1774 census listed 228 people, 33 families, on Prudence. Just before the Revolution, there were about 20 farms on the island; about half of the land was owned by residents of the island.

The mid-eighteenth century was a prosperous era for Prudence—its affluence seems to have been tied to trade relationships with Newport, one of the great colonial ports. A study of probate records from this period suggests that both tenant and land-owning farmers on Prudence prospered. Until 1776, as one historian has noted, "the economic vitality of Newport and the lands in and around the Bay provided Prudence Island with a medium for growth and prosperity which would never again be equaled as an agricultural community."

During the Revolution, Prudence Island agriculture was almost completely destroyed. All residents and livestock were evacuated; nearly every house and barn was burned. Newport never fully recovered from the
The effects of the war and was never again the trading center it had been. The war had lingering effects on Prudence as well—its population was decimated, its urban center was diminished, and its trading opportunities dried up. The population was decreased by almost 50 percent, and land ownership reverted to a few. In 1780, there were only 7 landholders for Prudence.

Through the nineteenth century, Prudence remained a backwater. Economic activity slowed, and the island became far more isolated than it had been in the previous century. Landholdings remained stable and only rarely changed hands. A few small family farms remained in operation. Some large landholders exported some produce from their land—John Brown of Providence, for example, owned over 1500 of the island’s 4000 acres and shipped his farm products to the mainland.

During this period of stagnation, Farnham Farm came into operation. The farm was owned by the Dennis family, which constructed a small house (still at the center of the existing house) and a barn. Little is known about this period of the farm's development, but it seems likely that the Dennises combined subsistence and small commercial farming on their acreage, maintaining some stock and cultivating grains and corn.

In the later decades of the nineteenth century, Prudence Island became a small, summer colony. The Prudence Land Company purchased and developed several hundred acres on the west shore for house lots; a number of houses were built for summer vacationers; a recreational hall was built; and a new stone wharf was constructed to accommodate visitors. During the 1880s and 1890s, some island families began to take in summer boarders or operate small boarding houses. A seasonal ferry running from the east shore of the island to Bristol brought some summer visitors, and some east shore farms were divided into small house lots and built upon.

But Prudence Island never became a major vacation center. Its summer colonies tended to remain as stable as its farms. With few public accommodations, it never attracted large numbers of day visitors, and its summer houses were, for the most part, small structures which remained in the families which had built them.

By the mid-twentieth century, Prudence was a quiet, forgotten corner of Rhode Island. Most of its farms had ceased operation, and farm fields were slowly returning to scrub and forest. A trickle of summer people came to the island each year, but there was no significant commerce, and the island's connections with the mainland were tenuous. The operations of the U.S. Navy in the mid-century decades (when the southern end of the island became an ammunition depot) removed a number of historic farmsteads. In 1954, Farnham Farm, by then the last of the island's farms, ceased operation.
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Farnham Farm
Name of Property

Portsmouth
City/Town

Newport County, Rhode Island
County and State

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


Chase, Captain Halsey. “History of Prudence Island.” (address given before the Bristol Rotary Club August 28, 1946).

Historic Collaborative, LLC. Farnham Farm Initial Assessment Report.


Notes from oral history told by Todd Farnham to Joseph Bains.


Town of Portsmouth. Land Evidence Records, Plot #84/Lot #81/ Parcel #1. On file at Portsmouth Town Hall, Portsmouth, Rhode Island.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM References (continued):
5. 19 306547 4607576
6. 19 306239 4607688

Boundary Description

Beginning at a point in the EASTERLY line of Mt. Pleasant Avenue, said point being the SOUTHWESTERLY corner of the land herein being described;
Thence running NORTHERLY along said Mt. Pleasant Avenue Four Hundred Three & 24/100 ths. (403.24') ft. more or less to a point, in the SOUTHERLY line of the land now or formerly of Armand G. Caroulo;
Thence turning an interior angle of 96°-33'-00" and running EASTERLY, bounded on the NORTH by said Caroulo land, Three Sixty One & 90/100 ths. (361.90') ft. more or less to a point;
Thence turning an interior angle of 96-08' and running in a general NORTHERLY direction, bounded on the WEST by said Caroulo land, Five Hundred Twenty Eight & 75/100 ths. 9528.75') ft. More or less to a point marked by a drill hole at the intersection of two stone walls;
Thence turning an interior angle of 94°-00' -00", and running EASTERLY along a stone wall, bounded on the NORTH by land now or formerly of Normand, Annette & Edward Collamatti in part, and in part by land now or formerly of Robert, Roberta, Winfred & Mathew Gallagher, Six Hundred Forty Two & 02/100 ths. (642.02') ft. More or less to an intersection of said stone wall and stream;
Thence turning an interior angle of 87° -17' -53" and running SOUTHERLY, bounded on the EAST by land now of formerly of Albert William Jiaoavelli, One Thousand Eighteen & 00/100 ths (1018.0') ft. more or less to a point on a stone wall for a corner;
Thence turning an interior angle of 88° -13' -42' and running WESTERLY along a stone wall, bounded on the SOUTH by land now of formerly of Albert William Jacovelli, Three Hundred Eighteen & 86/100 ths. (318.86') ft. more or less to a point marked by a Drill Hole on said stone wall;
Thence turning an interior angle of 180° -30' -00" and continuing in a WESTERLY direction, bounded on the SOUTH by land now of formerly of Albert William Jiaoavelli, Seven Hundred Seven & 43/100 ths. (707.43) ft. more or less to the point and place of beginning.
The above described parcel contains an area of 18.38 Acres, more or less, and is the WESTERLY portion of lot #81 on Tax assessor's map #84.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Farnham Farm
Name of Property

Portsmouth
City/Town

Newport County, Rhode Island
County and State

Section Number 10 Page 9

Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass all of the significant buildings and structures that are historically associated with Farnham Farm during more than a century of agricultural prosperity, adaptation and renovation. The boundaries include the farmhouse, barn, milk house, stonewalls, grazing pastures, gardens, orchards and paths.
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

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![Farnham Farm Location](image)