



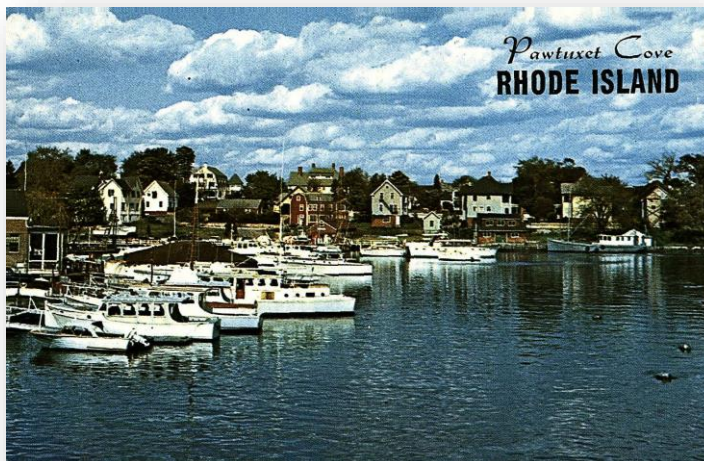
Rhode Island Resources

Family History Sources in the Ocean State

Rhode Island History

If two words could describe Rhode Island and its history, they would be *religion* and *trade*.

In October 1635, Roger Williams was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony because of his religious views. The following January, he settled in present-day Rhode Island on land he purchased from the Narragansetts. In 1637, Anne Hutchinson and others made Rhode Island their home when they, too, were forced out of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.



Early relations with the Narragansetts and other Native American tribes were fairly peaceful. The peace came to an end, however, with King Philip's War, which began around Narragansett Bay. After the end of the conflict in 1676, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts had a series of disagreements over boundaries of their respective charters.

Early settlers in Rhode Island took advantage of its position on the coast and established the colony as a major seaport. Unfortunately, this also resulted in Rhode Island becoming a major part of the triangle trade route, which brought slaves to North America. Despite its large role in the slave trade, Rhode Island became the first American colony to ban the importation of slaves.

Trade was vital to Rhode Island's economy. Trade ties to England led to many in Newport to remain loyal to the Crown during the Revolutionary War. It was also the reason that the Rhode Island legislature prohibited the state militia from being called up to federal service in the War of 1812. War with England was not viewed as beneficial.

Rhode Island's position as a seaport and its reputation for religious tolerance resulted in a diverse population. English Quakers and Portuguese and Spanish Jews settled in Rhode Island and could be granted freeman status. (Catholics were not afforded this status.)

After the slave trade ceased being an economic force in Rhode Island, the economy turned to manufacturing, especially textiles. Mills attracted Irish immigrants as well as French-Canadians and people from other New England states.



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Rhode Island Census Records

Rhode Island took various colonial censuses beginning in 1706. The earliest known census that exists was taken in 1730. These early censuses were taken for different reasons; who was included varies by census.

Rhode Island conducted state censuses every ten years between 1865 and 1935. The 1895 census is missing, however. Rhode Island is included in the surviving portion of the 1890 Special Schedule of Union Veterans and Widows.

Rhode Island and Related Censuses Available on Ancestry.com:

- [Rhode Island, Compiled Census and Census Substitutes Index, 1740-1890](#)
- [Rhode Island State Censuses, 1865-1935](#) (Note: does not include 1895, which is missing, and the 1905 census)
- [1890 Veterans Schedules](#)

Rhode Island Vital Records

Some birth and death records were recorded with town clerks beginning in 1630. Not all births and deaths were recorded. In some cases, families would record the births of several children at one time. These group listings may not have included children born later. Marriage intentions were mandated to be recorded beginning in 1647, though it was not enforced. Vitals records are more complete beginning in 1700, when new laws were enacted.

Statewide registration of births, marriages and deaths began 1853.

Rhode Island Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Rhode Island, Vital Extracts, 1636-1899](#) *Free*
- [Rhode Island, Births, 1636-1930](#)
- [Rhode Island, Deaths, 1630-1930](#)
- [Rhode Island, Marriages, 1851-1920](#)
- [Web: Rhode Island, Find A Grave Index, 1663-2013](#) *Free*

Military Collections

- [Rhode Island Colonial War Servicemen, 1740-62](#)
- [Rhode Island Pensioners, 1835](#)
- [U.S., Union Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865](#)



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Other Collections

- [Rhode Island City Directories](#)
- [Rhode Island, Indexes to Naturalization Records, 1890-1992](#)
- [New England, The Great Migration and The Great Migration Begins, 1620-1635](#)
- [U.S., Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860-1918](#)
- [U.S., Indexed Early Land Ownership and Township Plats, 1785-1898](#)
- [U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989](#) (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)

Other State Resources

- [Rhode Island Genealogical Society](#)
- [Rhode Island Historical Society](#)
- [Rhode Island State Archives](#)
- [Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association](#)
- [Rhode Island USGenWeb Project](#)

Help and Advice

- [Rhode Island Family History Research](#)
- [Rhode Island County Resources](#)
- [Map of Rhode Island](#)

[View all Rhode Island collections on Ancestry.com](#)

Significant Dates (through 1934)

1524 – Giovanni da Verrazano explored Narragansett Bay.

1614 – Adriaen Block, a Dutch mariner, explored what is now called Block Island.

1635 – William Blackstone was the first European to settle in Rhode Island.

1636 – Roger Williams founded Providence after being banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

1638 – Anne Hutchinson was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony; she brought settlers with her to Rhode Island.

1639 – The Newport Compact was signed.

1663 – King Charles II granted the charter for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

<i>Population</i>	
1790	68,825
1800	69,122
1810	76,931
1820	83,059
1830	97,199
1840	108,830
1850	147,545
1860	174,620
1870	217,353
1880	276,531
1890	345,506
1900	428,556
1910	542,610
1920	604,397
1930	687,497
1940	713,346
1950	791,896



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1675-1676 – King Philip's War, a series of skirmishes and battles between the Narragansetts and white settlers. The war ended with the death of Narragansett chief Metacomet (called "King Philip" by the settlers).

1677 – Hebrew Cemetery in Newport, the oldest Jewish cemetery in the U.S. still in existence, opened.

1693 – Royal patent increased the size of Rhode Island and encroached on land claimed by Massachusetts.

1719 – Catholics were barred from voting.

1763 – Touro Synagogue, the oldest existing synagogue in the U.S., opened in Newport.

1769 – Protestors burned the HMS *Liberty*, a British customs ship, in retaliation for seizure of two ships from Connecticut. This was one of the first acts of open defiance against the British government in the colonies.

1772 – Rhode Islanders burned the HMS *Gaspée*, a British customs ship, in protest of British trade policies.

1774 – Rhode Island became the first colony to ban the importation of slaves.

1776 – On 4 May, Rhode Island became the first colony to declare its independence from Britain.

1783 – Law barring Catholics from voting was repealed.

1784 – Gradual emancipation of slaves began. Children born after 1 March 1784 were considered "apprentices," with females considered free when they reached age 18, males at age 21.

1790 – Rhode Island became the last of the 13 colonies to ratify the U.S. Constitution.

1790 – In Pawtucket, Samuel Slater opened the first successful water-powered cotton mill in the United States.

1804 – The Storm of October 1804 (also known as the 1804 Snow Hurricane) heavily damaged Newport and Providence.

1812 – Rhode Island legislature prohibited the state militia from being called up to federal service in the War of 1812.

1824 – Female weavers in Pawtucket go out on strike in support of male weavers' protests of long hours and low wages. This became the first factory workers strike in the U.S.

1828 – St. Mary's, the first Catholic church in Rhode Island, was founded in Newport.

1841-1842 – Dorr's Rebellion was an effort to overturn a property requirement for voting in the state. The property requirement prevented many in Rhode Island's burgeoning cities from voting. The requirement was lifted in 1843.

1853 – Statewide registration of births and deaths began.

1866 – Rhode Island abolished racial segregation.

1924 and 1926 – The Watchman Industrial School, a school for African-American children, was burned. The Ku Klux Klan was suspected; no arrests were made in either fire.

1938 – A hurricane struck Rhode Island and killed 258 people.

