Rhode Island Genealogy Research

Indigenous peoples
The peoples living in the area now called Rhode Island before Europeans arrived were the Niantic, the Narragansett, the Wampanoag, the Pequot and the Nipmuck.

Drawing of Roger Williams and Native Americans - http://www.history.com/topics/roger-williams

The Pequots had some land in southwestern Rhode Island. They attempted to maintain their autonomy and made war on the European settlers. This led to their near-extinction as the colonists, allied with the Narragansett and the Mohegan tribes, defeated the Pequot.
The Nipmuc Indians occupied some land in Northern Rhode Island. It is believed that most of their survivors of King Phillips's War fled into Canada.
The Niantics lived in the southern part of mainland Rhode Island.
Their leader, Ninigret, prolonged their viability by keeping distance from the Native Americans who rebelled against the colonists.
Roger Williams socialized and negotiated a land treaty with **Narragansett** and **Wampanoag** leaders on his arrival in the 1630s. Canonicus, the sachem, or ruler, of the Narragansetts, became a close friend of Williams until his death in 1647. Massasoit headed the Wampanoags, and Williams helped bring some degree of peace between these two nations.
King Phillip's War: In the 1670s, the leader of the Wampanoags was Philip, the son of Massasoit. He attempted to unify New England's Native American groups in order to overthrow the colonists' grip on the region. Betrayal and intrigue escalated the situation into what became known as King Philip's War.
By summer 1676, the Narragansetts had been broken and the Wampanoags decimated; Philip's surviving family members were sold into slavery. The end of King Philip's War signified the end of the Native American way of life in Rhode Island.

European Exploration and Colonization
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, also banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, brought more settlers.
1639 – The Newport Compact was signed.
1663 – King Charles II granted the charter for Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
1675 to 1676 – King Philip's War ended resistance from Native American peoples. (See Above)
1677 – Hebrew Cemetery opened in Newport; it is the oldest Jewish cemetery in the U.S. still in existence.
1693 – A 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.
1772 – Rhode Islanders burned the HMS Gaspé, a British customs ship, protesting British trade policies.
1774 – Rhode Island became the first colony to ban the importation of slaves.

Independence
1776 – On 4 May, Rhode Island became the first colony to declare its independence. However, many citizens feared that their overseas trade businesses would suffer.
1783 – The law barring Catholics from voting was repealed.
1784 – Gradual emancipation of slaves began. Children born after 1 March 1784 were classified as "apprentices." Age of freedom for women was 18; for men it was 21.

Statehood
May 29, 1790 – Rhode Island was the last of the 13 colonies to ratify the U.S. Constitution and become a state, after assurances were made that a Bill of Rights would become part of the Constitution.
1790 - In Pawtucket, Samuel Slater opened the first successful U.S. water-powered cotton mill.
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 went 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. This requirement prevented many poorer citizens from voting. The requirement was lifted in 1843.
1853 – Statewide registration of births and deaths began.
1866 – Rhode Island abolished racial segregation.

Rhode Island Vital Records
Indexes, Microfilms of Rhode Island Vital Records:
- RI State Archives – copies of public vital records beginning in 1853 and microfilms of pre-1852 municipal vital records
- Library of Rhode Island Historical Society – copies of vital records 1636 to about 1900, indexes of state vital records 1853 to about 1900, and indexes of various other records
- *Ancestry.com* and *FamilySearch.org* : indexes of RI births, marriages, and deaths for varying years

Private Vital Records
Birth and **marriage records less than 100 years old** and **death records less than 50 years old** are kept at the **Rhode Island Office of Vital Records.**
- Law allows specific family members or legal representatives to obtain copies.

Obtain a birth certificate dated on or after Jan. 1, 1960 from the **City or Town Clerk's Office.** Usually copies are sent more quickly from the city or town office than from the state.

Public Vital Records

Birth and marriage records 100 years or older and death records 50 years or older are considered public records. They are kept in two locations:

- The Clerk's Office of the City or Town where the event occurred. These records begin with the founding of the city or town.
- The Rhode Island State Archives. Records in the State Archives begin in 1853.

Obtain copies of public vital records from the Town or City Clerk or from the State Archives.

Rhode Island Genealogical Repositories

American-French Genealogical Society
Brown University Rockefeller Library
Davisville Free Library
Rhode Island Historical Society
Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association
Rhode Island State Archives
Rhode Island State Library
Rhode Island Black Heritage Society
Rhode Island Genealogical Society
Roger William University Library
East Greenwich Free Library
Newport Historical Society
Providence City Archives
Providence Public Library

Rhode Island Church Records

Before 1900, major Rhode Island religious groups included Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, Protestant Episcopal, Roman Catholic, and Society of Friends.

Some church records are published in volumes 7 to 11 of James Arnold, *The Vital Records of Rhode Island.*

Contact a local church to view historical membership records or historical baptism, christening, marriage and death records.

Another source of church membership information is the local genealogy library or society.

Rhode Island Church Historical Archives

Baptist

American Baptist-Samuel Colgate Historical Society

Congregational

Congregational Library and Archives

Episcopal

Diocese of Connecticut

Huguenot

1686-1691 - De Forest, L. Effingham. *"Records of the French Church at Narragansett 1686-1691,"* The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Jul. 1939)

Reformed

Sacred Journey Church of Providence, Rhode Island

Methodist

Boston University Theological School Library
United Methodist Archives Center, Drew University Library

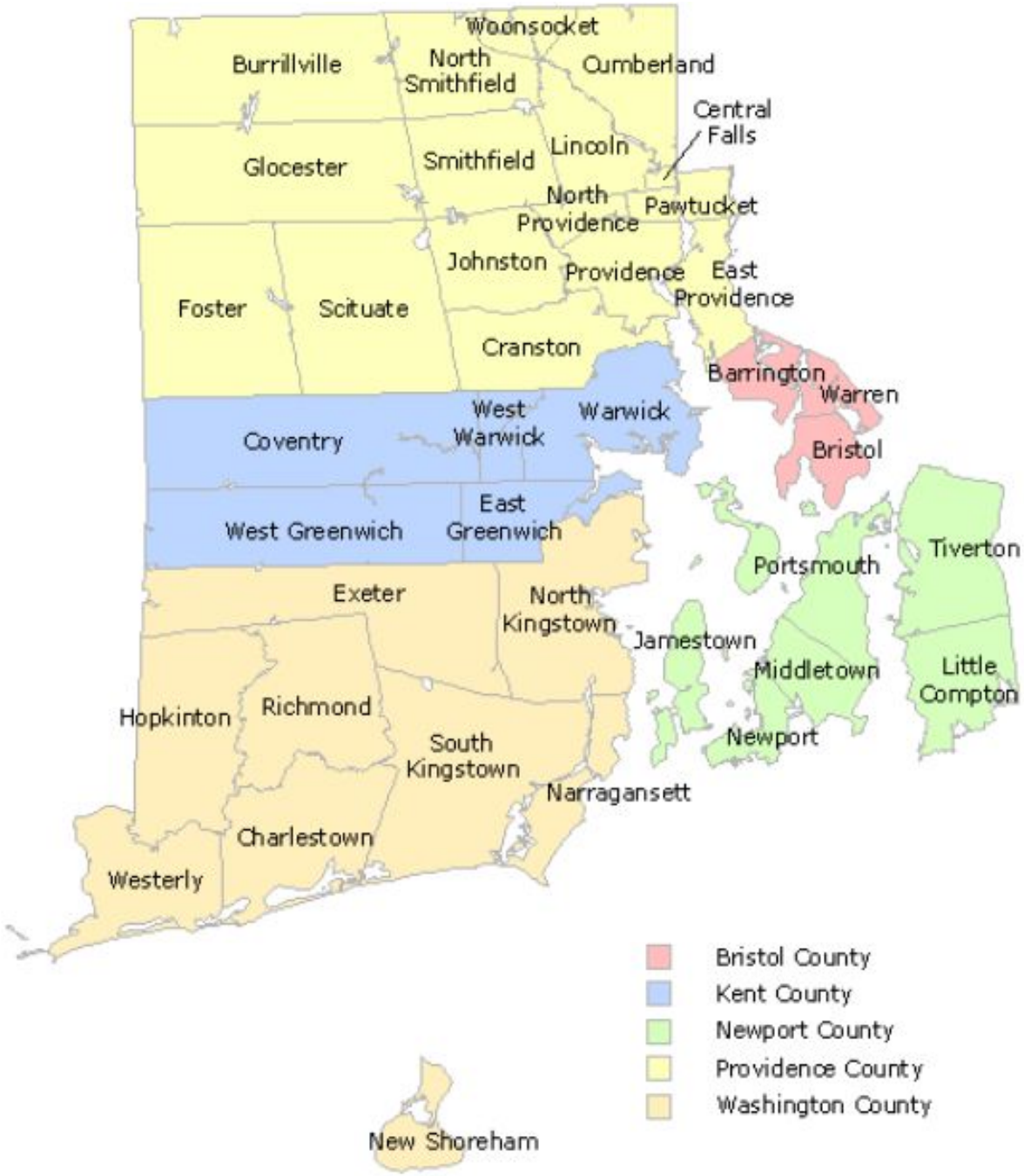
Roman Catholic

Diocese of Providence

Society of Friends

New England Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends records at Rhode Island Historical Society

Rhode Island Counties



The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000. - http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

Rhode Island Migration Routes
Atlantic Coast Ports - Long Island Sound - Narragansett Bay - Taunton River - Blackstone Valley - King's Highway - Old Roebuck Road - Pequot Path

Rhode Island Land Records
Indexes, images, microfilms of Town Deeds:
FamilySearch.org: Browse images of *Rhode Island, Town Clerk, Vital and Town Records, 1630-1945.* This database is currently being indexed.
Deeds and other land records for most Rhode Island towns are on *microfilm* at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City.

Colonial "Land Evidences"
The earliest land grants were made by the colony. The records of these grants are known as "land evidences." The original land evidences are at the Rhode Island State Archives.
Land evidences have also been recorded in the book by Dorothy Worthington: *Rhode Island Land Evidences, 1921, Reprint* (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1970)

Proprietors' Land Records
In the colonial period, the general assembly granted land to groups of colonists who became the proprietors of towns. These proprietors divided the land into portions owned by individuals and portions owned in common. The proprietors, in turn, sold land to other individuals.

The proprietors' records begin as early as 1659 for the Narragansett area (southern Rhode Island). Transcripts of some of the records, 1659 to 1686, are in James N. Arnold, *The Records of the Proprietors of the Narragansett* (Providence, Rhode Island): Narragansett Historical Publishing, 1894.
Some land transfers and grants are recorded in the *Proceedings of the General Assembly, 1646 to 1851*. These are at the Rhode Island State Archives and at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City on 18 microfilms.

Town Deeds
After proprietors sold their land or a town was incorporated, the town clerk recorded deeds and mortgages. Contact the town clerk for a copy of a deed or mortgage.

Rhode Island Genealogy Research Websites
NOTE: Check online for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestor lived.

Access Genealogy, Rhode Island – military records RI soldiers in various wars, censuses, maps, Native Americans - https://www.accessgenealogy.com/rhode-island-genealogy
BLMA Rhode Island Shipwreck Database –listing of shipwrecks" in Rhode Island waters from Colonial times to the present day" – a work in progress - http://beavertaillight.org/wrecks/index.html#download

Colonial Court Records –Kent County, Providence County, and King County records various years – view images, no index - http://www.rihs.org/connect/online-exhibits/colonial-justice-gallery/
New England Historic Genealogical Society -**$** - online databases of many vital records, tax lists, church records, early settlers, etc. in the New England states - viewers can sign up for *a guest account to read a few databases free* – www.americanancestors.org
WASHINGTON COUNTY, RI: **Marriages in Christ Church in Westerly, RI** - Alphabetical list of marriages occurring in the Christ Church of Westerly Rhode Island 1834-1899 – https://riahgp.genealogyvillage.com/Washington/Marriage/ChristChurch/

Rhode Island African American Research

Access Genealogy – links by state to websites of African American genealogy, cemeteries, and censuses
AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data - http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/
AfriGeneas – slave records, death and marriage records, censuses, surnames – chat or send messages to other researchers - http://afrigeneas.com/
International African American Museum - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories – military records of the U.S. Colored Troops are currently being digitized - https://cfh.iaamuseum.org/records/
Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery - search thousands of "Information Wanted" advertisements taken out by former slaves in all states searching for family members lost by sale, flight, or enlistment – the collection currently includes newspapers from 1853 to 1911 - http://www.informationwanted.org/
Slave Voyages - the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* documents vessels along the Atlantic slave routes from 1514 to 1866; *Intra-American Slave Trade Database* documents vessels traveling between the Atlantic and Pacific ports ranging from the United States to Brazil; the *African Names Database* gives names, ages, possible origins of slaves liberated from captured slave ships between 1808 and 1862 - https://www.slavevoyages.org/

Rhode Island Cemetery Research

PROVIDENCE, RI: **Eight Cemeteries in Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Providence** - click on name of cemetery to search burial list - http://www.diocesepvdcemeteries.org/about/genealogy/
Rhode Island Historical Cemetery Commission – index of gravestones, dates of birth and death, names of family members, cemetery maps – www.rihistoriccemeteries.org

Rhode Island Military Research

Grand Army of the Republic Records Project – developing database - histories of posts, reports of officers and members if available, search by state - http://suvcw.org/garrecords/

Above information courtesy of:
Ancestry.com – Learning Center and *FamilySearch.org – Wiki*
RI State Department of Health
Genealogy Gems from the Allen County Public Library
Family Tree Magazine