

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 Phillip'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. Canonibus, 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 Phillip'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 Phillip'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 Gaspée, 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	Rhode Island Black Heritage Society
Brown University Rockefeller Library	Rhode Island Genealogical Society
Davisville Free Library	Roger William University Library
Rhode Island Historical Society	East Greenwich Free Library
Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association	Newport Historical Society
Rhode Island State Archives	Providence City Archives
Rhode Island State Library	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

- Check online for the *GenWeb* and *Genealogy Trails* of the county in which your ancestor lived.
- Find links to genealogical websites for many states and counties on *Ancestor Hunt* and *Cyndi's List*.

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://beavertailight.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/>

African Ancestry - DNA testing of maternal and paternal lineages of African descent -results are specific countries and specific ethnic groups of origin - uses database of over 30,000 indigenous African DNA samples - <https://africanancestry.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://suvchw.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