

## Tips for Navigating Rhode Island Records

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### EARLY FAMILIES

- John O. Austin's *The Genealogical Dictionary of Rhode Island; Comprising three generations of Settlers who came before 1690*. USE ONLY the 1968 or 1978 versions published by Genealogical Publishing which contain hundreds of important corrections.
- Clarence A. Torrey. *New England Marriages Prior to 1700*, vol. 1 – 3 (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2011)
- For the earliest families, also see *The Great Migration* series from New England Historic Genealogical Society.
- Various special manuscripts and compiled family genealogies at the Rhode Island Historical Society; selected ones are on Family History Library microfilms #22318-22359
- Check for possible published genealogies through Worldcat.org, the R.I. Historical Society card catalog, the New England Historic Genealogical Society Library card catalog, and Ocean State Library Catalog (<http://encore.oslri.net/iii/encore/>)
- *Rhode Island Roots* and other genealogical journals should be searched for family names and neighborhoods. Visit [rigenoc.org](http://rigenoc.org).

### CEMETERIES

- Early cemeteries typically small and away from the road; some were locally consolidated, many left as is.
- Searchable database, with some images and grave descriptions: R.I. Historic Cemetery Commission - [www.rihistoriccemeteries.org](http://www.rihistoriccemeteries.org)  
See especially the useful map of known Rhode Island cemeteries.
- See green volumes published by the Rhode Island Genealogical Society for some larger cemeteries or towns.

### CENSUS

- Colonial census:
  - 1774 – published as a book by Bartlett, see also transcription in original order serialized in *Rhode Island Roots* 2003-2009.
  - 1777 – MILITARY census of males (not just heads of households); serialized in *Rhode Island Roots* 1981-1984 then published (blue book).
  - 1782 – published by Jay Mack Holbrook; see also transcription in original order serialized in *NEHG Register* 1973-1975.
- State census collections existing for 1865, 1875, 1885, 1905, 1915, 1925, 1935. Find them on FamilySearch, or, (missing 1905) AmericanAncestors.org and Ancestry.com.
- 1820 Census of Manufactures <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/280127>



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- Federal Mortality Schedule for Rhode Island 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/830730>
- 1890 Veterans Schedule, U.S. Federal Census  
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8667/>
- 1930 Merchant Seaman Schedule, U.S. Federal Census  
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8851/>

## CHURCH RECORDS

- Arnold, James N. *Vital Records of Rhode Island, 1636-1850*. Volumes 11 – 21 contain many church records.
- Episcopal records may be archived at the University of Rhode Island
- Check local repositories or diocese; record retention is spotty.
- For Catholic records, try American French Gen. Soc. In Woonsocket
- Seventh Day Baptist Historical Library & Archives  
<https://sdbhistory.org/resources/> (membership req)
- Dartmouth, Mass.: Quaker Records, 1699-1920  
<https://www.dartmouthhas.org/quaker-transcriptions.html>



## COURT & STATE RECORDS

- Colonial Justice: Early Rhode Island Court Records Project offers a small set of court records from the Rhode Island Historical Society. <http://www.rihs.org/mss227b1f1/>
- Fiske, Jane Fletcher. *Gleanings from Newport Court Files 1659-1783*. Boxford, Massachusetts: 1998.
- Fiske, Jane Fletcher, transcriber. *Rhode Island General Court of Trials 1671-1704*. Boxford, Massachusetts, 1998.
- Early R.I. Court Index: <https://helindigitalcommons.org/lawarchive/>
- Bartlett, John R. *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island*. Providence: A.C. Greene and Bros., State printers, 1856, 10 vols.

## IMMIGRATION

- Ancestry.com: Rhode Island, Indexes to Naturalization Records, 1890-1992
- “Rhode Island Naturalization Records” – guide to FamilySearch record sets available from home  
<https://onerhodeislandfamily.com/2021/03/04/rhode-island-naturalization-records>.
- “Stories of Rhode Island’s Diverse Heritage” blog post leads you to Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission booklets for immigrant groups:  
<https://onerhodeislandfamily.com/2020/12/03/rhode-islands-diverse-heritage/>
- Taylor, Maureen A. *Rhode Island Passenger Lists – Port of Providence 1798-1808; 1820-1872 – Port of Bristol and Warren 1820-1871*; Compiled from United States Custom House Papers. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1995.



## LOCAL REPOSITORIES AND MANUSCRIPTS

- RHODI guide to local historic sites and organizations <http://www.RHODI.org>
- Use ArchiveGrid to search numerous Rhode Island colleges and repositories at once: <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>
- Rhode Island Historical Society, Robinson Research Center, Providence
- Newport Historical Society, Newport
- Smaller historical sites, organizations, and archives: [www.RIAMCO.org](http://www.RIAMCO.org)
- American French Genealogical Society (& library), Woonsocket
- RIAMCO: Rhode Island Archival and Manuscript Collections Online <https://www.riamco.org/>
- Rhode Island History Digital Collection <https://archive.org/details/JCBRedwood>

## MAPS AND DEEDS

- The 1855 Walling map of Rhode Island: <http://ids.lib.harvard.edu/ids/view/5271618>
- Rhode Island State Atlas 1870: <http://www.historicmapworks.com/Atlas/US/738/>
- Sanborn Maps for the State of Rhode Island: [https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/collections/id\\_578/](https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/collections/id_578/)
- Portsmouth Historical Society "Land Grant Maps" <https://portsmouthhistorical.org/land-grant-maps/>
- U.S., Historic Land Ownership and Reference Atlases - Browse "Rhode Island" <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1205/>
- Rhode Island Sanborn Maps on Brown Digital Repository [https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/collections/id\\_578/](https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/collections/id_578/)
- Digitized deeds on FamilySearch.org are normally for use within Family History Library Affiliate Libraries only; a few towns have more recent digitized deeds through the town website.
- Find pre-1900 deeds in two possible places:
  - Visit the official town website and look for deeds, for instance, Newport deeds <https://i2f.uslandrecords.com/RI/Newport/D/Default.aspx> Most other towns have been done only partially or not at all.
  - FamilySearch – drill down by place to the town; then look under Land and Property
- Mary A Gowdey house histories: <https://gowdey.ppsri.org/>
- Providence House Directories at city archives: <https://t93c12bb2a2098924.starter1ua.preservica.com/>



## MILITARY

- *Rhode Island in the American Revolution* by Eric G. Grundset, a bibliography published by the DAR.
- Benjamin Cowell's *Spirit of 76 in Rhode Island*.
- R.I. Casualties Finding Aids: Civil War and WWI, also War of 1812 Participation <https://sosri.access.preservica.com/archive>
- Muster Rolls, Revolutionary War from the R.I. Historical Society at <https://www.rihs.org/the-revolutionary-war-in-rhode-island-explore-the-records/>
- Civil War records finding aid at the Rhode Island Historical Society: <https://www.rihs.org/mssinv/Mss673sg4.htm>
- MANY Civil War regiments produced published volumes; check the Providence Public Library, RI Historical Society, and the state archives.
- For Civil War deaths, check the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial: <https://archive.org/details/proceedingsatded01rhod> and Robert Grandchamp, *Rhode Island's Civil War Dead: A Complete Roster*.
- WW1 and WW2: state archives may hold service records

## NEWSPAPERS

- *Providence Journal* 1821-present also at:
  - Evening Bulletin 1860's-1923 [GenealogyBank.com](http://GenealogyBank.com)
  - Providence Journal 1950-1960 [GenealogyBank.com](http://GenealogyBank.com)
- *Providence Journal* basic searches free; the site sells a daily pass for seeing the full articles: <https://providencejournal.newsbank.com/>
- New Rhode Island papers on *Chronicling America* and more coming <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

## PROBATE

- Most pre-1900 probate is available on [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com), but poorly indexed and must be browsed (utilizing the indexing in the original books). A list of each town's record sets helps you find what you need. Find Rhode Island Probate Today – <https://onerhodeislandfamily.com/2021/01/13/find-rhode-island-probate-today/>

## TOWN AND CITY RECORDS

- Early records for selected towns published as R.I. Genealogical Society *Gleanings* volumes; see [www.rigensoc.org](http://www.rigensoc.org)
- Early records of the Town of Providence (21 vols. + index by Richard LeBaron Bowen)
- Watch for evolution of towns in each county and shifting borders for towns; John H. Cady, *Rhode Island Boundaries, 1636-1936* (State of R.I., 1936).
- For town histories, see <https://onerhodeislandfamily.com/2016/06/18/town-histories-and-newspapers/>



## VITAL RECORDS

- Kept in towns; also copied to the state 1851-present (more reliably 1853-present). Birth & marriage private for 100 years; death for 50.
- Indexing of early records from towns, churches, and newspapers: James Newell Arnold, Vital Record of Rhode Island 1636-1850, v. 1-21. Find them:  
<https://onerhodeislandfamily.com/free-rhode-island-resources/free-r-i-vital-records/>
- Images of records since 1853 may appear in small record sets on FamilySearch.org (drill down by town); full sets may only be available through a Family History Library Affiliate.
- State copies of vital records 1853-legal cutoff (100 yrs B & M and 50 yrs for D) on State Archives website at <https://catalog.sos.ri.gov/repositories/2/resources/1342>  
If requested instead, small fee for copies. State Archives. Request at [statearchives@sos.ri.gov](mailto:statearchives@sos.ri.gov).
- Alden Beaman's Rhode Island Vital Records, New Series v 3-12 cover Newport, Washington and portions of Kent counties by extrapolating "vital records" from other records such as cemeteries and probate.
- Returns of Death, unindexed, Providence, on FamilySearch.org:
  - 1856-1921 <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/752298>
  - 1844-1849; 1851-1855 <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HT-67NQ-V5Y>
- The State Archives offers an explanatory booklet about the vital records:  
[https://sosri.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO\\_05b8240c-15f6-4a18-a266-637fec81de4c/](https://sosri.access.preservica.com/uncategorized/IO_05b8240c-15f6-4a18-a266-637fec81de4c/)

