



House History Resources

Books: Historical and Architectural

- ▶ Cady, John Hutchins. *The Civic and Architectural Development of Providence*. Providence, RI: The Book Shop, 1957. Ref. F 89 .P9 C143
- ▶ Downing, Antoinette F. et al. *Early Homes of Rhode Island*. Garrett & Massie, 1937.
- ▶ Gowdy, Mrs. William B. and Antoinette F. Downing. *Gowdy Collection: Providence Preservation Society House Histories*. Providence, RI: Providence Preservation Society, 1950? RdRm NA 7238 .P9 G6
- ▶ Historic American Buildings Survey. RdRm VF H629
- ▶ Isham, Norman A. *Early Rhode Island Houses*. Preston & Rounds, 1895.
- ▶ Jordy, William A. and Christopher P. Monkhouse. *Buildings on Paper: Rhode Island Architectural Drawings 1825-1945*. Providence, RI: Bell Gallery et al, 1982. RdRm NA 2706 .U6 J67
- ▶ Woodward, Wm McKenzie, Edward F. Sanderson. *Providence: A Citywide Survey of Historic Resources*. Providence, RI: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1986. F 89 .P9 R459
- ▶ **Note:** Be sure to check the card catalog for more titles on specific towns and neighborhoods.

Books: House Genealogy and Restoration Guides

- ▶ Albert, Denis P. et al. *Fixing Up: A Bilingual Handbook for Older Homes*. Mowbray, 1979 (English and Portuguese) TH 4816 .5628
- ▶ Ellsworth, Linda. *The History of a House and How to Trace It*. Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1976. (see reference desk)
- ▶ Kennedy, Pamela A. *Easy Guide to Rehab Standards*. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1992. NA 107 .R4 R46 1992
- ▶ Light, Sally. *House Histories: A Guide to Tracing The Genealogy of Your Home*. Spencertown, NY: Golden Hill Press, 1995. Ref. E 159 .L54 1995

Bibliographies

- ▶ Woodward, William McKenzie & Edward F. Sanderson. *Preservation Library: A Reader's Guide*. Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1986. Z 5943 .H58 R

Web Sites

- ▶ National Museum of American History www.americanhistory.si.edu/house/
- ▶ Cyndi's List www.cyndislist.com/houses.htm/
- ▶ Old House.com: The Interactive Old House Network www.oldhouse.com/newsite/

Organizations

- ▶ Providence Preservation Society 21 Meeting St Providence, RI 02906
(401) -831-7440 www.providencepreservation.org

Libraries

- ▶ Newport Historical Society and Museum 82 Touro St. Newport, RI 02840
(401) - 846-0813 www.newporthistorical.org Tuesday-Friday 9:30-4:30 Saturday 9:30-12:00
- ▶ Providence Public Library 225 Washington St. Providence, RI 02903
(401) -455-8000 www.provlib.org Monday-Thursday 9-8 Friday-Saturday 9-5:30
- ▶ Rhode Island Historical Society Library 121 Hope St. Providence, RI 02906
(401) -331-8575 www.rihs.org Tuesday-Saturday 9-5
- ▶ Rhode Island School of Design Library 2 College St. Providence, RI 02903
(401) -454-6100 www.risd.edu Monday - Thursday 8:30-11pm, Friday 8:30-8pm, Saturday 10-6, Sunday 2-11 Call to Confirm hours

Government Agencies

- ▶ Providence City Hall 2 Dorrance St Providence, RI 02903
(401) -421-7740 www.providenceri.com
- ▶ Rhode Island Preservation and Heritage Commission 150 Benefit St Providence, RI 02903
(401) -222-2678 or 222-2077 www.rihpc.state.ri.us
- ▶ Local Town Hall or Clerk's Office

Other Sources

- ▶ Bonham, Julia C. and Gary Kulic. *Rhode Island: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites*. U.S. Department of the Interior, 1978. T 22 .R4 K84
- ▶ Graphics Division, Rhode Island Historical Society Library. Graphics has photographs, maps and architectural drawings. These materials are available by appointment only.
- ▶ Sanborn Fire Insurance maps Microfilm G3770 .S35 F57



How To Research Your House History

Rhode Island Historical Society Library ~ 121 Hope St. ~ Providence, RI 02906 ~ 401.331.8575 ~ www.rihs.org

Perhaps you have just moved into a “new” old house or maybe you recently discovered a treasure in the home where you have lived all of your life. However familiar you are with your old home you will almost certainly find clues that will lead you and your imagination into the past. Letters tucked away in the floorboards or backyard artifacts that rise to the surface during spring rains never cease to peak our curiosity about whom before us lived within these walls. As you begin researching the history of your house you will discover that old homes often have a way of owning us rather than us owning them.



Four types of historical information can help you find your house history: oral histories, documented records, inferred information, and physical evidence. Be sure to explore all of these sources. From oral histories you can expect to discover the appearance of the house, use of rooms and decor, former occupants, and events held at the house. Documented sources will give you more factual information including building permits, names of owners, architects and builders, cost, and original floor plans. Inferred or interpreted information is an educated guess filling in the pieces of a puzzle without hard evidence. Be careful not to infer what you hope to be true, honesty in your research will make future research efforts easier and more rewarding. Physical evidence can be found in the style and method of construction to artifacts left behind by previous owners. Nails, hardware, mouldings, and other architectural elements can help to date a house.

Included in this packet are: **House History Resources**, a good starting point to learn about architecture in Rhode Island’s cities and towns. This list also provides a variety of organizations which will help you to begin your research. **Providence Preservation Society Research Procedure**, an excellent step-by-step guide to researching house histories in Providence but is also generally applicable in most other Rhode Island towns. A list of **Land and Probate Records for Rhode Island Towns** includes location and dates of records.

Some things to keep in mind when you are tracing the history of your house are that not every house will have a detectible past, some records may not have survived as long as the house. Keep good detailed records of your own and work chronologically backwards to establish a “deed chain.” Good luck!

“Old houses mended, Cost little less than new before they’re ended.”

- Colley Cibber



Land and Probate Records in Rhode Island

See also *Local Government Records in Rhode Island, A Survey and Summary*. Ref. CD 3480 .S6

<i>Town</i>	<i>Dates</i>	<i>Probate</i>
Barrington	before 1747 1747-1770 1770-	Taunton, MA Warren, RI Town Hall, Barrington, RI
Bristol	before 1747 1747-	Taunton, MA Town Hall, Bristol, RI
Burrilville	1806-	Town Hall, Harrisville, RI
Central Falls	1895-	Clerk's Office, Central Falls, RI
Charlestown	1738-	Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall, Carolina, RI
Coventry	1741-	Town Clerk's Office, Washington, RI
Cranston	1754-	City Hall, Cranston, RI
Cumberland	1747-	Town Hall, Valley Falls, RI
East Greenwich	1679-	East Greenwich, RI
East Providence	1816-1862 1862-	Taunton, MA Town Hall, East Providence, RI
Exeter	1743-	Town Clerk's Office, Victory Hwy, Exeter, RI
Foster	1781-	Town Clerk's Office, Foster Center, RI
Glocester	1731-	Town Hall, Chepachet, RI
Hopkinton	1757-	Town Hall, Hopkinton, RI
Jamestown	1678-	Town Clerk's Office, Jamestown, RI
Johnston	1759-1898 1898- 1759-	City Clerk's Office, Providence, RI (probate only) Town Clerk's Office, Johnston, RI (current probate) town Clerk's Office, Johnston, RI (all land records)
Lincoln	1871-1895 1895-	City Clerk's Office, City Hall, Central Falls, RI Town Clerk's Office, Lonsdale, RI
Little Compton	before 1747 1747-	Taunton, MA Town Clerk's Office, Little Compton, RI

Middletown	1743-	Town Clerk's Office, Middletown, RI
Narragansett	1888-	Town Clerk's Office, Narragansett Pier, RI
Newport	1639-1779 1779- 1779-1841	Custody, Newport Historical Society City Clerk, City Hall, Newport, RI microfilm of wills and inventories at RIHS library
New Shoreham	1672-	Town Hall, Block Island
North Kingstown	1674-	Town Hall, Wickford, RI
North Providence	1765-1874 1874-	City Hall, Pawtucket, RI Town Hall, Centredale, RI
North Smithfield	1871-	Town Clerk's Office, Slatersville, RI
Pawtucket	1828-1862 1862-	Taunton, MA City Hall, Pawtucket, RI
Portsmouth	1636-	Town Hall, Portsmouth, RI
Providence	1636-	City Hall, Providence, RI
Richmond	1747-	Town Clerk's Office, Carolina, RI
Scituate	1731-	Town Clerk's Office, North Scituate, RI
Smithfield	1731-1895 1895-	City Clerk's Office, Central Falls, RI Town Clerk, Georgiaville, RI
South Kingstown	1674-1723 1723-	Town Hall, Wickford, RI Town Hall, Wakefield, RI
Tiverton	before 1747 1747-	Taunton, MA Town Clerk's Office, Tiverton, RI
Warren	before 1747 1747-	Taunton, MA Town Clerk's Office, Warren, RI
Warwick	1647-	City Hall, Apponaug, RI
Westerly	1669- 1699-1877	Town Hall, Westerly microfilm of wills and inventories, RIHS library
West Greenwich	1741-	Town Hall, West Greenwich
West Warwick	1913-	Town Hall, West Warwick
Woonsocket	1867-	City Hall, Woonsocket

