

Rhode Island

Courtesy of the
Rhode Island Historical Society

Rhode Island Briefly



Rhode Island is the smallest state in the union, measuring only thirty-seven miles wide and forty-eight miles long. This has earned it the nickname "**Little Rhody**."

Despite being the smallest state in the union, Rhode Island has the longest name. The official name is the **State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations**. Rhode Island is bordered by Massachusetts to the north and west, Connecticut to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the south connected by Narragansett Bay and Rhode Island Sound.

The Early Days

Giovanni Verrazzano is considered to be the man who "discovered" Rhode Island in 1524. Norsemen or Vikings may have been there before then, but there is no evidence of them remaining. There were also several Indian tribes living in Rhode Island when Verrazzano first set foot on it. He named the land Rhode Island after the Greek island of Rhodes - the name it still has today.

Narragansett Indians

There were several Native American tribes that lived on Rhode Island. The largest tribe was the **Narragansett Indians**. They were part of the Algonquin family of tribes. Second largest were the Wampagnoags who were the Narragansett's enemies and there were many battles between the two tribes. Other tribes inhabiting Rhode Island were the Nipmucks, Niantics and Pequots.



Roger Williams and the Colonial Period



Roger Williams founded Rhode Island in 1636. He originally lived in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, but felt the Puritans there were too strict. He set out to create a place where people were free to believe and practice their chosen religions. Williams became friends with the Narragansett Indians, from whom he bought land to set up a colony for other religious outcasts. Part of Williams' original settlement included the city of Providence, which is now the state's capital and largest city.

During the colonial period, Rhode Island was a profitable farming community. Sheep and horses were raised on the farms along with apples, onions and flax. Timber was also profitable for Rhode Islanders. Rhode Island's main source of income was its ports where goods could be exported to the other colonies and England. The sea also proved plentiful, with whales, fish and other marine life that could be sold for food, oil or fertilizer.

Rhode Island was part of the **triangle trade route**, which helped bring slaves from Africa. Molasses came to Rhode Island from the West Indies to be made into rum. The rum would then be sent to the African coast to purchase slaves, which were then brought to the West Indies and the southern states.

The American Revolution



Rhode Island was one of the first states to become involved in the American Revolution. The British were heavily taxing the colonists on their profitable imports and exports, and placing restrictions on the importing of molasses. On May 4, 1776, Rhode Island was the first state to renounce King George III and British rule. Ten weeks later, the state ratified the Declaration of Independence.

Rhode Islanders were very prominent during the Revolutionary War. **Nathaniel Greene** was George Washington's second-in-command and chief of the southern Continental Army. Many slaves, both African and Indian, joined to form the **First Rhode Island Regiment**, also known as the "Black Regiment." The French army under **General Rochambeau** used Newport as its operations base to aid the colonists.

Following the war, the state quickly ratified the Articles of Confederation. But Rhode Island was happy being an independent state and did not join the union until May 29, 1790 becoming the last of the 13 colonies to do so.

The Industrial Revolution



The economy of Rhode Island began to switch from agricultural to industrial. Textile manufacturing and **cotton** mills were springing up across the state with **Moses Brown** and **Samuel Slater** leading the way. In addition to cotton and wool, precious metals, especially **gold and silver jewelry**, were another main source of industry.

Civil War Era



The Civil War affected Rhode Island more economically than any of the other Union states. The **textile mills** were dependent on southern cotton and there were still slave traders working out of Rhode Island. But Rhode Islanders were more concerned about preserving the union than their economic prosperity and sent many men into the war. The textile mills worked to create uniforms and blankets for the soldiers on the front and the ports worked to continue the movement of needed supplies. The **metal smiths and factories** fashioned weaponry, ammunition, engines and horseshoes.

Following the war, Rhode Island became one of the one richest states in the union. Its five largest industries were **textiles, base metals, steam engines, precious metals and rubber goods**. The cities along the water were becoming as famous for their resorts as for their trade ports. Farms and granite mines were also prosperous.

Rhode Island in Transition

This prosperity continued until the late 1970's and 1980's as factories began to close their doors and move to cheaper production in the south. Unemployment rose and many people began to leave the state.

Rhode Island Today



Reforms in the last 20 years have begun to transform Rhode Island. Providence, its state capital, has become a growing city with new construction and tourism boosts. **Newport** remains a **coastal resort town** with heavy summer traffic. Rhode Island is also a center for higher education with **Brown University, University of Rhode Island, Johnson and Wales University, Providence College, Salve Regina University and Roger Williams University** being leading educational institutions.

Fast Facts about Rhode Island



- ❖ **State Capital** - Providence
- ❖ **Size** - 1,545 square miles (smallest state in the United States)
- ❖ **Population** - 1,048,319 (2000 census)
- ❖ **Largest City** - Providence
- ❖ **Major Cities** - Newport, Warwick, Pawtucket, Woonsocket, Cranston,
- ❖ **Major Industries** - Textiles, jewelry, machinery, tourism, health and financial services
- ❖ **Highest Point** - Jerimoth Hill (812 ft.)
- ❖ **Lowest Point** - Sea levels at the coasts
- ❖ **State Nicknames** - The Ocean State, Little Rhody
- ❖ **Number of United States Senators** - 2
- ❖ **Number of United States Representatives** - 2
- ❖ **State Motto** - Hope
- ❖ **State Song** - "Rhode Island It's For Me"

More Facts about Rhode Island

- ❖ Newport, Rhode Island is home to the Tennis Hall of Fame.
- ❖ The Flying Horse Carousel in Watch Hill is the nation's oldest. It was built in 1850.
- ❖ The Redwood Library and Athenaeum in Newport, founded in 1747, is the oldest library in the United States.
- ❖ The first circus took place in Newport in 1774.
- ❖ The oldest schoolhouse in the U.S. is in Portsmouth, built in 1716.



State Symbols



Flag



Seal



Flower: Violet



Bird: Rhode Island Red



Tree: Maple



Fish: Striped bass



Rock: Cumberlandite

Rhode Island Reading List



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