



Rhode Island State History ~ In a Nutshell ~

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Rhode Island State History In a Nutshell
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What is the "In a Nutshell" series?

This is a series of concise, easy to understand information on many popular topics. You will find that many of products in this series can also be found as part of larger publications and/or curriculum on the publisher's website. At the end of each book, you will find a list of questions that may be used to help you review the material.

Rhode Island State History Lapbook Journal Study Guide



The Great Seal of Rhode Island

The smallest state of the union, Rhode Island, also has the longest official name of any of the states: "State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations". The state is one of the most densely populated and heavily industrialized for its size.

For a state that is only 37 miles wide and 48 miles long, it is notable that its shoreline on Narragansett Bay in the Atlantic Ocean runs for 400 miles. Indeed, one of Rhode Island's nicknames is "the Ocean State."

The legendary mansions of Newport overlook the ocean at Narragansett Bay. Many of these spectacular homes are open for tourists and offer an inside glimpse into the lives of America's high society. The Breakers, the magnificent Vanderbilt mansion built in 1895, is one of the most elegant private homes that has ever graced the Newport shorefront.

This state was named by Dutch explorer Adrian Block. He named it "Roodt Eylandt" meaning "red island" in reference to the red clay that lined the shore. The name was later anglicized when the region came under British rule.

People who live in Rhode Island or who come from Rhode Island are called Rhode Islanders.



Map of Rhode Island - Lakes, Rivers, and Waterways © geology.com

STATEHOOD

On May 29, 1790, Rhode Island became the 13th state to be admitted into the Union.

STATE CONSTITUTION

The Rhode Island Constitution is the state constitution of Rhode Island. It describes the structure and function of the state's government. The constitution was ratified in November 1842, and became effective in May of 1843. Prior to this time, the state was governed by the original royal charter granted of 1663.

PREAMBLE: *We, the people of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, grateful to Almighty God for the civil and religious liberty which He hath so long permitted us to enjoy, and looking to Him for a blessing upon our endeavors to secure and to transmit the same, unimpaired, to succeeding generations, do ordain and establish this Constitution of government.*

STATE GOVERNMENT

The government of the State of Rhode Island, like that of the United States, is divided into three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial.

The legislative branch (Rhode Island General Assembly) is the lawmaking branch of state government. It is bicameral and made up of the House of Representatives (lower house), which has 75 members, and the Senate (upper house), which has 38 members. Members of both houses are elected by popular vote to two-year terms and may serve no more than four consecutive terms.

Legislative Process: The legislative branch of government is responsible for making and maintaining laws within their jurisdiction. United States representatives and senators, federal legislators, are responsible for laws at the national level and state legislators are responsible for laws at the state level. A law begins as an idea that is introduced in the Rhode Island General Assembly as a bill by one or more legislators. The bill then goes through the legislative process to become a law. During this process the bill may be changed. Not all bills become law.

The executive branch enforces the laws. The governor of Rhode Island is the chief executive officer of the state and is elected by voters for a four-year term and may serve no more than two consecutive terms. He or she is responsible for appointing certain state officers, veto or approval of bills passed by the General Assembly, calling special sessions of the legislature, and commanding the state militia. The Governor is also responsible for the preparation of the state budget, and ensures that all laws are obeyed in the state. The voters in Rhode Island elect four other positions in the executive branch, attorney general, treasurer, lieutenant governor and secretary of state.

The judicial branch (state's court system) interprets the laws and makes decisions about the laws and those who break them. The Rhode Island Supreme court is the state's highest court and is made up of a chief justice and four associate justices, all chosen for life by the state legislature. The chief trial court is the superior court, made up of 21 judges appointed for life by the governor with the consent of the senate. The superior court hears felony cases, equity cases and appeals from district court. Rhode Island also has family, district, municipal, and probate courts.

U.S. CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

The legislative branch of the United States government makes laws for our nation and raises and distributes money to run the United States government. The most evident part of the legislative branch is the United States Congress. Congress is divided into two parts, called houses. The two parts are the Senate and the House of Representatives. Congress is referred to as a bicameral body because it is made up of two houses. The Latin roots of the word bicameral, "bi" and "cameral," mean two chambers or rooms.

Members of the Senate are called Senators and members of the House of Representatives are called Representatives. Senators and representatives serving in these two bodies are sometimes referred to as congressmen, or women, and sometimes as legislators because their business is to legislate or make laws. The role of the legislative branch is defined in the United States Constitution.

Each state elects people to represent them in the United States Congress in Washington, DC. The citizens of each state elect two senators to represent them in the Senate. They also elect representatives to represent them in the House of Representatives. The number of representatives each state sends to the House of Representatives is not a specific number like the Senate, but is based on the population of the state. The people, that are elected to represent the state's citizens in the United States Congress, are referred to as the Congressional Delegation.

There are 100 senators in the U.S. Senate. Each is elected to a term, in the Senate, of six years. There are 435 representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives. Each is elected to a term, in the "House," of two years.

The citizens of Rhode Island elect two people, like every other state, to represent them in the Senate and two people, based on Rhode Island's current population in the most recent federal census, to represent them in the House of Representatives.

STATE SEAL

The seal of the State of Rhode Island features a maritime anchor as its central image. The anchor has been used as a symbol for Rhode Island for hundreds of years, well before the region claimed statehood. When the Providence Plantations were organized in the mid 1600's, the anchor was used then as the seal of the province.

The anchor is also the prominent image on Rhode Island's flag.

The word "Hope" was placed over the seal's anchor in 1644, and still remains.

The outer circle of the seal reads "Seal of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations 1636".



STATE CAPITAL (Providence)

Providence is the capital of Rhode Island. It was one of the first cities established in the United States and is the most populous city in Rhode Island.

The Rhode Island State House is the capitol building located in Providence housing the Rhode Island General Assembly as well as the offices of the governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, and treasurer.



Rhode Island's State House was built between 1895 and 1904. It has 327,000 cubic feet of white Georgia marble, 15,000,000 bricks, and 1,309 tons of iron floor beams. At night, the building glows beautifully from 109 floodlights, which help to make it visible to neighboring cities and towns.

The State House dome is the fourth largest, self-supported marble dome in the world. The largest is St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the second

largest is the Minnesota State Capitol and the third largest is the Taj Mahal in India. On the inside of the dome, there is a wonderful painting, "The Four Freedoms" by Rhode Island artist James Allen King.

On top of the dome is a gold-covered bronze statue of the Independent Man, originally named "Hope." The statue, weighing more than 500 pounds (230 kg), is 11 feet (3.4 m) and stands 278 feet (85 m) above the ground. Independent Man represents freedom and independence and alludes to the independent spirit which led Roger Williams to settle and establish Providence and later Rhode Island.

The current State House is Rhode Island's seventh state house and the second in Providence after the Old Rhode Island State House. It was designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead, and White and constructed from 1895 to 1904. The building had a major renovation in the late 1990s.

The building served as the United States Capitol exterior in the 1997 film *Amistad*. It also served as the "City Hall of Capitol City" in Disney's *Underdog*.

The chamber of the Rhode Island Senate is located in the east wing of the building while the chamber of the Rhode Island House of Representatives is located in the west wing. Other notable rooms in the State House include the rotunda (beneath the dome), the State Library (north end), and the State Room (south end). The State Room is an entrance area for the office of the Governor and contains a full-scale portrait of George Washington by Rhode Island native Gilbert Stuart. This room is also where the Governor has press conferences and bill signings at the State House.

Inside the State House is carved marble. Over the pillared porticoes are quotations and historical chronologies of Rhode Island. Throughout the rotunda are battle flags, statues, and guns representing the state's military past. In the center of the rotunda, under the marble dome, is a brass replica of the state seal.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhode_Island_State_House

STATE MOTTO

“Hope”

The official state motto of Rhode Island is simply "Hope." The state motto appears on the great seal and flag of Rhode Island. The use of the word "Hope" was probably inspired by the biblical phrase "hope we have as an anchor of the soul."

STATE FLAG

Almost 90 years after Rhode Island became the last of the original thirteen colonies to form a union, the General Assembly of the state adopted an official design for a state flag.

The colors and design of the flag date back to colonial times and the original establishment of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations under King Charles II of England. The most prominent feature of the flag, the anchor, dates back to 1647 and the Cromwellian Patent of 1643 when the Providence Plantations were established. Later, when a more liberal charter was bestowed upon the colony, the anchor was again chosen for the seal. The word "HOPE" was added.



The colors, white and blue, were flown during the American Revolution, the War of 1812 and the Mexican War. The thirteen stars representing the original thirteen colonies were also displayed on flags flown by the Continental Regiments during the Revolution.

Today's flag is much the same flag that was adopted in 1897. Centered on the white field is an anchor surrounded by thirteen stars. Below the Anchor is a blue ribbon that displays the word "HOPE", the state motto.

STATE NICKNAMES

The Ocean State (Official)

This nickname was formulated to attract tourism to Rhode Island and appears on non-commercial license plates. "Ocean State" began appearing on Rhode Island license plates in 1972, replacing "Discover." The Rhode Island Tourism Division promotes over 400 miles of coastline. This is not all ocean frontage but includes Narragansett Bay extending inland from the Atlantic Ocean north to the center of the state. All Rhode Islanders live within a 30-minute drive to the Atlantic Ocean or Narragansett Bay.

Little Rhody

Little Rhody, a traditional nickname for Rhode Island, is obviously in reference to the state's small size. Rhode Island is the smallest of the 50 states in area. Variations include "Little Rhodie," "L'il Rhody," and "Little Rhode."

The Plantation State

This name is derived from the state's official name, "State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations."

The Smallest State

This sobriquet* for Rhode Island, like the nickname "Little Rhody," is in reference to Rhode Island's size.

Land of Roger Williams

Roger Williams, who founded Providence Plantation in 1636, is the source of this sobriquet. *

The Southern Gateway of New England

This historical nickname was bestowed because Rhode Island was the most southerly of the New England states with harbors suitable for ocean-going ships. These harbors allowed New England raw materials and finished goods to be shipped to other parts of the United State and foreign countries and allowed raw and finished goods from other parts of the United States and foreign countries to be delivered to New England.

Sobriquet (pronounced sO-bri-kA or sO-bri-ket) means "descriptive name."

STATE BIRD

The Rhode Island Red chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) was designated the official state bird of Rhode Island in 1954.

When the bill was signed into law, then Governor Dennis J. Roberts stated: "The Rhode Island Red has become a symbol of Rhode Islanders all over the world."



The search for a bird to represent the State of Rhode Island began in 1931 when the Rhode Island Federated Women's Clubs, supported by the Audubon Society, sponsored a contest that included the votes of school children, boy scouts, campfire girls, the grangers, golf clubs, the four-high clubs and other patriotic organizations.

Six candidates were offered in this contest; the bobwhite quail; the osprey; the flicker; the tree swallow; the song sparrow and the catbird. Not one of the contestants was a chicken!

The top vote-getter was the bobwhite quail that, according to Alice A. Griffin, Chairman for the Department of Education at the time, "was chosen because he is widely distributed throughout the state, his plumage and song are attractive, he is a permanent resident and he is the farmer's friend."

The bobwhite quail and the second-place osprey were proposed to the Legislature as appropriate representatives of the State of Rhode Island. However, neither of these fine candidates was adopted by the Legislature and Rhode Island was left without an official state bird.

Twenty years later, in 1954, another statewide contest was sponsored. The Audubon Society, the Rhode Island Federation of Garden Clubs and the Providence Journal offered five candidates this time. Two previous winners, the bobwhite and the osprey, were in the running along with three new contestants; the towhee, the ruby-throated hummingbird and a breed of chicken called the "Rhode Island Red".

That it was even one of the contestants indicated that the Rhode Island Red chicken had many things going for it. First, the breed was developed in Little Compton, Rhode Island in 1854 specifically for the production of eggs. Second, the RI Department of Agriculture and Conservation, the entire poultry industry and the American Legion were backing and promoting the Rhode Island Red for commercial reasons.

The Rhode Island Red had developed quite a reputation in the state. First advertised in poultry journals in 1986, the chicken was rather famous. In 1925, a chicken plaque was placed on a

Below, you will find 15 general questions to help review what you have learned. Use the following page(s) for documenting your answers. Older students may choose to write a State Report as well.

Review Questions:

1. List the states and/or bodies of water that border this state.
2. What was the date of statehood?
3. What is the state capital?
4. What is the state motto?
5. Name at least one state nickname.
6. Describe the state flag.
7. What is the state bird?
8. What is the state flower?
9. List at least 5 other state symbols.
10. Describe this state's government.
11. Name the major imports and exports for this state.
12. Describe the weather and climate in this state.
13. List at least 5 famous people from this state.
14. Describe at least 5 significant events in this state's history.
15. What other interesting information have you learned about this state?

Answers to Review Questions:

