

Point of Interest: The Old State House
150 Benefit Street (1762, with later additions). This building served as the Colony House until independence, then the RI State House from 1783 to 1901. Independent minded as always, RI was the first colony to actually declare our independence two months before the other colonies and the last state to ratify the Constitution, until assured that its rights were protected. This building has housed the RI Historical and Preservation Commission since 1975. The commission works to protect and preserve RI's nationally significant architectural heritage.



1. Rhode Island State House

One Capitol Hill, Providence | (401) 222-3983
It is one of the grandest state houses in the U.S. for the country's smallest state. Designed by the renowned architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White, noted for the Boston Public Library (1895) and renovations to the White House (1902), the majestic domed building clad in white Georgia marble was built (1895-1904) at the high point of Rhode Island's industrial prosperity. Inside, a new museum showcases the Colonial Charter granted in 1663 by King Charles II of England. The Charter was the first signed by a monarch to guarantee religious liberty. Atop the State House dome stands a statue of Rhode Island's Independent Man, representing the spirit of freedom of thought and action.

2. Roger Williams National Memorial

282 North Main St., Providence | (401) 521-7266
A visionary and independent thinker, Roger Williams was warned by the Puritan authorities in Massachusetts Bay Colony to refrain from spreading his "new and dangerous opinions." Banished and alone, Williams wandered in the wilderness eventually settling in the land he named "Providence" in the spring of 1636. Befriended by the Narragansett tribe, he founded a community where any persons could think, worship and act in accordance with their own conscience without fear of persecution by the government. This spiritual and intellectual paradise to some was considered a hotbed of heresy to others. In 1965, Congress authorized the creation of the memorial and the 4.5-acre park opened to the public in the 1980s.

3. The Changing City: View From the Roger Williams National Memorial

Approx. 185 North Main St., Providence
Roger Williams settled in this area because of its fresh water spring. Look out from the park towards the west and you will see the gleaming white RI State House. Early settlers in Providence looked out onto the Great Salt Cove and wharves teeming with activity in this busy seaport. Filled in during the late 1800s as the city became an industrial powerhouse, the watery cove was covered with train tracks, as well as commercial and manufacturing buildings.

4. The Old Brick School House (ca. 1769) and the Providence Preservation Society

21 Meeting St., Providence
The progressive idea of promoting education to all in support of a free society was at the heart of this old brick schoolhouse. By 1800, Rhode Island had one of the earliest public education systems, housed in this building. In its long history as host to innovative educational initiatives, it served as a school for African American students, an early fresh air school for children suffering from tuberculosis, and site of the Meeting Street School, a pioneering organization for children of all mental and physical abilities.

The Providence Preservation Society (PPS), formed in 1956, leased the old schoolhouse from the city for its headquarters in 1960 and undertook restoration. Organized to rescue 18th and 19th century buildings in the College Hill area of the East Side of the city from demolition, the PPS saved the historic character of whole neighborhoods and has grown into a citywide advocate for preservation. The College Hill Study of 1959, sponsored by the PPS, the City of Providence and the Housing and Home Finance Agency, was an early example of urban revitalization using preservation and rehabilitation rather than demolition and redevelopment. Among many activities, it publishes the annual Ten Most Endangered Buildings List to raise public awareness of the threat to the city's architectural heritage.

5. Commercial North Main Street: From Colonial to Cast Iron

Approx. 125 North Main St.
This block of North Main Street encapsulates the area's three centuries as a thriving commercial zone with new storefronts imposed on older buildings to meet business needs.
Points of interest: A 1920s Art Deco front on an Italianate building built in 1873. The Joseph and William Russell House (1772) was elevated a story so a new business could be inserted below. The Elizabeth Building (1872) with its cast iron façade.

6. Early Industry and Wood-Fired Pizza!

Approx. 4 Steeple St., Providence
These three buildings are testaments to Providence as an early powerhouse of American industry. They preserve the scale and density of buildings in this commercial area before 20th century demolitions created the open spaces of the surrounding parking lots.
Points of interest: 3 Steeple Street (ca. 1793) is the oldest surviving industrial building in Providence. 9 Steeple Street (ca. 1847) was built as a jewelry factory. It is also known as the former location of Al Forno, the restaurant that invented wood-grilled pizza, one of many innovations that sparked the dining renaissance of Providence. The area was also formerly home to Brown and Sharpe and the Gorham Manufacturing Company, famed for its silver production.

7. Providence Art Club

11 Thomas St., Providence | (401) 331-1114
Providence's tightly knit community of artists and collectors created this club to congregate, create, and display art; it is the second oldest art club in the country after the Salmagundi Club in New York City. Among the founders was Edward Mitchell Bannister, a celebrated African American landscape painter. The western-most of the club's four buildings is the Fleur-de-Lys Studio (1885), built by Sydney Burleigh as workspace for himself and fellow club artists. Designated a National Historic Landmark, the studio is a masterpiece of Arts and Crafts architecture with finely rendered detail. On the street level corner is inscribed the phrase "Fair among the Fairest." Not everybody appreciated this building; H.P. Lovecraft found it so revolting that he set his horror story "The Call of Cthulhu" (1926) there.

8. First Baptist Church

75 North Main St., Providence | (401) 454-3418
The oldest Baptist church congregation in the United States was founded by Roger Williams in 1638. Worshipping first in private houses and later in austere meeting houses, the Baptists made a new and bold move in erecting this magnificent building in 1775, a period when Providence enjoyed economic success. The largest surviving wooden structure from Colonial America, it combines the simple hall of a traditional New England meeting house with the most fashionable English architectural features, such as the steeple, modeled after a version of the one at St. Martin in the Fields (1724), on Trafalgar Square in London, by architect James Gibbs. Brown University, founded as a Baptist college, has held its annual commencement in the church every year since 1776.

9. Rhode Island School of Design (RISD): Innovation and Design Excellence

11 Waterman St., Providence | (401) 454-6100
RISD is an internationally acclaimed leader in art and design education. Established in 1877 by 34 members of the RI Women's Centennial Commission, the school embarked on a radical experiment in education: combining the study of art, craft and design, from sculpture and textiles to furniture making and glass production. The red brick Waterman Building (1893) is a Venetian Renaissance landmark that was built to house art galleries, classrooms and studios. At the base of the hill is the Metcalf Building (1915), created to look and function as a textile factory to teach students about the practical manufacture of fabrics, as well as their design. RISD offers more than a traditional fine arts school education, with an emphasis on creative thinking, industrial design and superior craftsmanship. RISD's campus has expanded from College Hill into downtown Providence.

10. Market Square and the Market House

Approx. 8 North Main St., Providence
Designed by Joseph Brown in a restrained Georgian manner, the Market House (1775) was intended as a magnificent landmark to the wealth of the Colonial city at the heart of the bustling waterfront. The ground-level arcades originally provided open stalls for fishmongers, butchers, and produce vendors, while the upper floor housed government functions. A Masonic Hall occupied the third floor, added in 1797. During the 19th century, the Market House served as City Hall during a 30-year debate (1845-75) over the construction of a new City Hall. It has housed classrooms for RISD since the 1950s. Market Square, always a site for news, gossip and shopping, was the site of a Colonial tax protest against the British on March 2, 1775 when the people of Providence burned tea. On September 7, 1897, Emma Goldman, a noted anarchist and feminist, was arrested for unlawful "open air speaking" and charged with attracting a crowd in Market Square. Nowadays you are more likely to encounter a RISD student's art installation.

11. RISD Museum

20 North Main St., Providence | (401) 454-6100
Founded in the same year as the school, the RISD Museum has one of the country's finest collections of art from across many cultures, time periods and media, from ancient Egyptian artifacts and early American decorative arts to French Impressionist paintings and cutting edge film and video. The museum supports the school's original focus on industrial arts education in many forms from textiles to jewelry design. The museum's groundbreaking exhibitions, broad educational outreach and extensive public programs continue to form the foundation of a thriving creative culture in Providence.

12. The Providence Athenaeum (1838)

251 Benefit St., Providence | (401) 421-6970
In the early 1800s, Providence attracted artists and writers, many of whom gathered at the Athenaeum. In 1845, the writer Edgar Allan Poe fell in love with the Providence poet, Sarah Helen Whitman in this dignified Greek Revival style library. She called off their engagement in 1848 when his sobriety was questioned. Providence inspired the work of a remarkably creative writer, H.P. Lovecraft (see "Personalities" section), who set his novel "The Shunned House" (1924) in a Colonial house on Benefit Street.

13. Brown University Quadrangle

College St./Prospect St., Providence | (401) 863-1000
Renowned for "The Brown Curriculum," an innovative approach to undergraduate education instituted in 1970, this Ivy League school's philosophy states that students, who are free to design their own curriculum, are "the architects of their own course of study." Founded in 1764 by Baptists as Rhode Island College, the school moved to Providence in 1770 and became "Brown University" in 1804 after a generous donation by Nicholas Brown, the prominent Providence businessman and alumnus of the school.
Points of interest: The Van Wickles Gates (1901), Carrie Tower (1904), University Hall (1770), Hope College (1823), Manning Hall (1834), Slater Hall (1879), Rhode Island Hall (1840) and Robinson Hall (1878).

14. Stephen Hopkins House (ca. 1708)

15 Hopkins St., Providence | (401) 524-3012
Stephen Hopkins (1701-1785), signer of the Declaration of Independence, ten-time governor of RI and Chief Justice of the RI Supreme Court bought this house in 1743. In addition to politics, he was the first Chancellor of Brown University, a merchant, surveyor and astronomer. His house was relocated twice, finally settling on its present location in 1927 when it became a museum of the Colonial Dames of America.

15. First Unitarian Church (ca. 1818)

1 Benevolent St., Providence | (401) 421-7970
A masterpiece by Providence architect John Holden Greene, the Federal-style building has classical arches and urns combined with soaring pointed Gothic style windows with delicate tracery decoration. Originally the First Congregational Church, the congregation became associated with the Unitarian movement and eventually changed its name.

16. John Brown House Museum (1788)

52 Power St., Providence | (401) 273-7507
Success, ambition and glamour dominate this block of Benefit Street. John Brown became wealthy from his family's shipping business, which included privatizing, the Triangular Slave Trade and the China Trade. This luxurious house, one of the grandest in the United States, played host to presidents George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and John Quincy Adams. John Nicholas Brown, a great collector and preservationist, bought his great-great-great uncle's house and donated it in 1942 to the R.I. Historical Society which now operates the house as a museum.

17. Governor Henry Lippitt House (1865)

199 Hope St., Providence | (401) 453-0688
Textile manufacturer Henry Lippitt, his wife and six children lived in this opulent house, a testament to the burgeoning wealth of industrial Providence. The interiors of this National Historic Landmark are a time capsule of Victorian decoration and fine woodwork. Prominent guests included Alexander Graham Bell. The family was active in many areas of public service. Henry became the 33rd governor of Rhode Island and his wife founded the Rhode Island School for the Deaf in 1876, which still operates today.



Providence Walks: The East Side

A Story of Innovators, Industrialists, Intellectuals and the Irrepressible.

Providence is, and always was, a place for the fiercely independent. The visionary leader Roger Williams established the city in 1636 as a haven for freedom of conscience, where all people could practice their own religious beliefs, a place where they were not merely tolerated, but enjoyed the right of true religious equality. Freedom of thought reigned, which opened the way for freedom of action. The economy boomed as the city grew into a great seaport in the 18th century and an industrial powerhouse in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Leading schools, libraries, art clubs and literary societies were established and the arts flourished, but boom times were followed by economic and social busts.

The Great Depression, industrial decline, and the havoc wrought by demolitions and urban renewal in the 1960s left their mark. But the city survived and became noted for historic preservation of its treasures, its food renaissance, and a thriving artistic and cultural life. Innovation in every way has always marked the city. Today, the streets and waterfront are lined with elegant landmark buildings and quirky old houses and shops, all the legacy of a great past and a vibrant present. So walk the timeworn streets of this remarkably and defiantly preserved town with layers of history and continually evolving contemporary art, design and food scenes. You will meet plenty of characters along the way. This walk brings you along the historic commercial zone of North Main Street and the residential area of Benefit Street in the heart of the College Hill District, noted for its concentration of 18th and 19th century buildings.



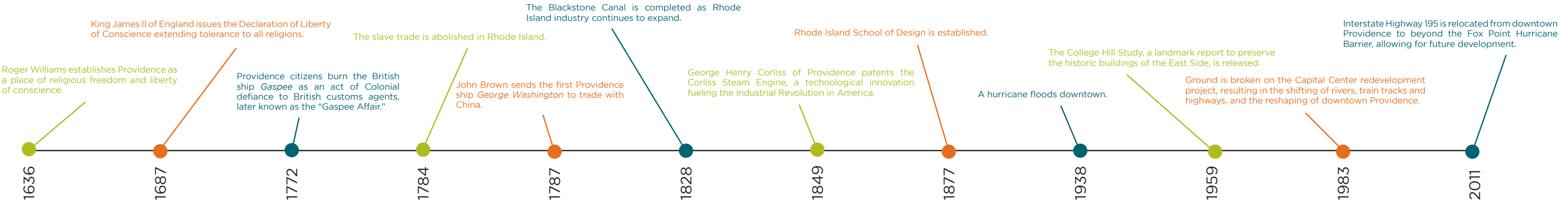
“Cities are museums of buildings and the people are their curators; the citizens of old cities are responsible for finding ways to safeguard, renew, and bring historic architecture into living use in the contemporary world.”
College Hill Study, Providence 1959

PROVIDENCE WALKS
The East Side

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Historic Timeline



Providence Personalities



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“I am Providence, and Providence is myself — to get her, indissolubly as one, we stand thro’ the ages.”
-H.P. Lovecraft

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1603-1683
ROGER WILLIAMS
Visionary thinker on religious freedom, equal treatment of Native Americans, and founder of Providence, Williams’ ideas of liberty and freedom of conscience made Rhode Island a haven for persecuted religious groups. He laid the groundwork for the ideas of liberty, equality and the separation of church and state in the U.S. Constitution.
“... that no civil magistrate, no King ... have any power over the souls or consciences of their subjects, in the matters of God ...”

THE BROWN BROTHERS
Among the original settlers of Providence in the 1600s, the Brown family emerged as powerful financial, industrial and cultural leaders shaping many of the city’s institutions through the centuries, from churches and schools to industry and historic preservation.
Moses (1738-1836): Founder of the first abolitionist society in Rhode Island, a philanthropist and pioneer industrialist.
John (1736-1803): First from Rhode Island to enter the China Trade, founder of the Providence Bank (the first bank in Rhode Island), industrialist, U.S. Congressman and slave trader. He built the grandest house in town and entertained presidents.
Nicholas (1729-1791): Merchant and builder of a great fortune, instrumental in relocating Rhode Island College, later named Brown University, to Providence.
Joseph (1733-1785): College professor, astronomer and architect of several of the city’s major 18th century landmark buildings.

1814-1885
WILLIAM J. BROWN
The son of slaves owned by Moses Brown, William was a free African American born in Providence. A sailor, shoemaker and temperance movement supporter, Brown wrote in his autobiography entitled “Life” (1883):
“Mr. Brown, my grandfather’s master, seemed well satisfied with his help and thought that although they were his property ... (it was) hence wrong to confine them any longer to servitude ... This was some time before the general emancipation in the State.”



1868-1893
MATILDA SISSIERETTA JONES
Born in Virginia, but later making College Hill in Providence her home, this world-renowned soprano sang for four presidents at the White House and the British Royal Family. She was the first African American to perform at the New York City Music Hall, later known as Carnegie Hall.

THE IRREPRESSIBLE SOCIETY
A charitable organization founded in the mid-19th century by prominent ladies who lived on or near Benefit Street, the Irrepressibles raised funds to pay poor families to make clothing for those in need, as well as provide new shoes, coal and other household goods.



MARGARET BINGHAM STILLWELL
A resident of Benefit Street and the accomplished librarian of the Annmary Brown Memorial, Margaret Stillwell wrote two books defending the street’s reputation in the 1940s when the area was in serious decline, calling for residents to repair buildings to “the spirit of youth which ... is still not too far gone to be recaptured.” Her vision was realized ten years later when Antoinette Downing and John Nicholas Brown helped launch the Providence Preservation Society.

H.P. LOVECRAFT
A master of weird fiction, the East Side resident Lovecraft achieved fame after his death. Author Stephen King described him as “... the 20th century’s greatest practitioner of the classic horror tale.”
Influenced by Poe, who spent time at the Providence Athenæum, Lovecraft created a unique world of fantasy and the macabre in stories such as the “Cthulhu Mythos.”
In his book “The Shunned House” (1924), inspired by a Colonial house on Benefit Street, his fascination for tombs is apparent.



“The city planners are now saying nice things about little old ladies in tennis shoes.”
Downing, *New York Times*, May 2, 1985

ANTOINETTE FORRESTER DOWNING
Referred to as the matriarch of Providence preservation, Antoinette Downing championed the rescue and restoration of hundreds of 18th and 19th century buildings in the College Hill District. Her visionary work and tireless advocacy in the face of resistance helped save the architectural heritage of the city.