

A Rhode Island Research Directory

By Maureen A. Taylor

When I was a reference librarian, two particular questions were asked more than all the others: Where can I find a comprehensive directory of genealogical resources in Rhode Island? And whom do I contact in Rhode Island for genealogical material? The answer to both is the same. Unless you have a specific inquiry in mind, there is no one resource that will help you identify the right group to contact for your request. In an attempt to offer guidance, this list is a mix of public libraries and historical societies that have collections on Rhode Island history and genealogy.

Public Libraries

For a small state, Rhode Island has an inordinate number of public libraries. If you look at a gazetteer of the state, you will be struck by the fact that though there are only 39 cities and towns, there are many more public and private libraries that maintain collections of local history and genealogy. This directory identifies specific libraries with the materials of local significance they house¹. A number of public libraries are online and can be located by using the [Office of Library and Information Services](#).

Though many of these libraries have small, serviceable collections of Rhode Island history and genealogy reference books, their value lies in their manuscript holdings, such as typescript histories, compiled genealogies, and vertical files of newspaper clippings. Since their collections focus on the history of a town or village, it is possible to find a variety of unique manuscript and visual materials. These kinds of items are generally not included in online catalogs, so your first step should be to ask a reference librarian for assistance. Be advised that librarians are only able to answer questions that pertain to their collections--please do not contact them with genealogical requests. Rules for using special materials vary, but most research repositories ask that you use pencils when taking notes, ask for permission before photocopying any local history materials, and bring change with you for photocopying. Unless otherwise stated, special collections are open to the public without advance notice. Materials are not, however, available for interlibrary loan or circulation.

- **Barrington:** Barrington Public Library, 281 County Rd, Barrington, RI 02806; (401) 247-1920. <http://www.barringtonlibrary.org/>. They have an extensive local history and genealogy collection. The library often sponsors lectures by local genealogical societies.
- **Bristol:** Rogers Free Library, 525 Hope St., P.O. Box 538, Bristol, RI 02809; (401) 253-6948. The library maintains a small collection relating to the history of the town.
- **Central Falls:** Central Fall Free Public Library, Adams Library, 205 Central St., Central Falls, RI 02863; (401) 727-7440. <http://www.cflibrary.org/>. This community library has a variety of holdings on Rhode Island, including standard reference books, oral history tapes, and photographs. It includes material on the English, French, and Spanish settlers to the area.
- **Charlestown:** Cross Mills Public Library, 4417 Old Post Rd., P.O. Box 1680, Charlestown, RI 02813; (401) 364-6211. <http://www.crossmills.org/>. The library maintains a small collection of local history materials.
- **Coventry:** Coventry Public Library, 1672 Flat River Rd., Coventry, RI 02816; (401) 822-9100. <http://www.coventrylibrary.org>. This library offers patrons local history materials, including an oral history collection, and materials relating to the Civil War. According to its Website, the "library is committed to maintaining a modest collection of genealogical materials for Coventry and Kent County.
- **Cranston:** Cranston Public Library, 140 Sockanosset Cross Rd., Cranston, RI 02920; (401) 946-5079. <http://www.cranstonlibrary.org>. At one time the collection of the Rhode Island Genealogical Society was on deposit in this facility. It boasts a fairly large reference collection.
- **Cumberland:** Cumberland Public Library, Edward J. Hayden Library, 1464 Diamond Hill Rd., Cumberland, RI 02864; (401) 333-2552. <http://www.cumberlandlibrary.org>. Located in a former monastery, the Cumberland Public Library collects local history and genealogy. The Reference Department maintains a vertical file and the Rhode Island Room of special research materials.
- **East Greenwich:** East Greenwich Free Library, 82 Peirce St., East Greenwich, RI 02818; (401) 884-9510. <http://www.eastgreenwichlibrary.org>. Through special donations this library collects genealogical material, such as census records and publications.

- **East Providence:** East Providence Public Library, Weaver Branch, 41 Grove Ave., East Providence, RI 02914; (401) 434-2453. <http://www.eastprovidencelibrary.org>. The collection features a vertical file as well as a complete run of East Providence High School Yearbooks from the 1920s to the present.
- **Foster:** Foster Public Library, Tyler Free Library, 81A Moosup Valley Rd., Foster, RI 02825; (401) 397-4801. <http://www.fosterlibraries.org>. The papers of the Foster Preservation Society are on deposit at the library.
- **Hopkinton:** Ashaway Free Public Library, 15 Knight St., P.O. Box 70, Ashaway, RI 02804; (401) 377-2770. Their holdings include a complete run of the *Chariho Times* newspaper.
- **Johnston:** Marian J. Mohr Memorial Library, One Memorial Ave., Johnston, RI 02919-3271; (401) 231-4980. The local history collection is located in the Reference Department.
- **Little Compton:** Brownell Library, P.O. Box 146, Little Compton, RI 02837. Street address: 44 The Commons, Little Compton, RI 02837; (401) 635-8562. The genealogical collection of the Little Compton Historical Society is available for use here.
- **Middletown:** Middletown Public Library, 700 West Main Rd., Middletown, RI 02842; (401) 846-1573. <http://www.middletownpubliclibrary.org>. The "Rhode Island Historical Collection" has material relating to the history of Aquidneck Island.
- **Newport:** Newport Public Library, Aquidneck Park, 300 Spring St., Newport, RI 02840; (401) 847-8720. The library collects material on Newport history. Reference staff are available to assist patrons with these items.
- **North Kingstown:** North Kingstown Free Library, 100 Boone St., North Kingstown, RI 02852; (401) 294-3306. <http://www.nklibrary.org>. This facility has a separate room for their local history and genealogy collection, which includes books, manuscripts, maps, and visual materials. Call for an appointment.
- **North Scituate:** North Scituate Public Library, Greenville Rd., North Scituate, RI 02857; (401) 647-5133. The Heritage Room contains genealogical materials and photographs. It is open by appointment only.
- **Pawtucket:** Pawtucket Public Library, Deborah Cook Sayles Memorial Library, 13 Summer St., Pawtucket, RI 02860; (401) 725-3714. <http://98.130.92.38/>. A separate room houses the local history collection that features, among other things, a set of city directories for the community.
- **Providence:** Providence Public Library, 225 Washington St., Providence, RI 02903; (401) 455-8000. <http://www.provlib.org/>. The Rhode Island Collection is located near the Reference Department and has a diverse collection of books, maps, and photographs. There is also a Special Collection department that maintains manuscripts and rare books. Call for an appointment.
- **Richmond:** Clark Memorial Library, Seven Pinehurst Dr., P.O. Box 8, Carolina, RI. 02812; (401) 364-6100. <http://www.clarklib.org/>. The Richmond Historical Society stores their papers at the facility. Researchers must call for an appointment to access this material.
- **Smithfield:** Greenville Public Library, 573 Putnam Pike, Greenville, RI 02828; (401) 949-3630. <http://www.yourlibrary.ws/>. The Rhode Island Genealogical Society's collection of books is available for use in this library.
- **South Kingstown:** South Kingstown Public Library, 1057 Kingstown Rd., Peace Dale, RI 02883; (401) 789-1555. <http://www.skpl.org/>. A separate room containing genealogy and local history is open to the public. The reference staff will help you locate specific items.
- **Tiverton:** Tiverton Library Services, Essex Library, 238 Highland Rd., Tiverton, RI 02878; (401) 625-6796. <http://www.tivertonlibrary.org/>. The Reference Department houses a very small collection on the history of the area that includes genealogical material on the Durfee, Gray, and Hart families.
- **Warwick:** Warwick Public Library, 600 Sandy Lane, Warwick, RI 02886; (401) 739-5440. <http://www.warwicklibrary.org/wpl/>. The library has a small collection of Warwick tax records.
- **Westerly:** Westerly Public Library, 38 Broad St., Westerly, RI 02891; (401) 596-2877. <http://www.westerlylibrary.org/>. The local history and genealogy room has material on southwestern Rhode Island and southeastern Connecticut. It is staffed by volunteers and has special hours: Monday 12-4PM, Tuesday 10AM-4PM and 6-8PM, Wednesday 10AM-4PM, Friday 10AM-4PM and Saturday 10AM-noon; closed Sundays and Thursdays.
- **Woonsocket:** Woonsocket Harris Public Library, 303 Clinton St., Woonsocket, RI 02895; (401) 769-9044. <http://www.woonsocketlibrary.org/>. Local history and genealogy materials include books written by and about the area's French-Canadian population. The library also has a database of historic photographs of the town.

Historical Societies

While most communities in Rhode Island have a historical society, most of them do not have established libraries. These organizations depend on volunteer staff to run programs and maintain historical collections. A partial list of town historical societies is available online through the [Rhode Island Historical Records Repositories Directory of Historical and Preservation Societies](#).

- **Barrington:** Barrington Preservation Society, 281 County Rd., Barrington, RI 02806; (401) 247-1920. <http://www.barrpreservation.org/>. The Society seeks to collect, organize, preserve and share artifacts and data on the town.
- **Block Island:** Block Island Historical Society, Old Town Rd., Block Island, RI 02807. The Society maintains a space to exhibit items from the collection, which features maps, photographs, furniture, paintings and genealogical materials.
- **Bristol:** Bristol Historical and Preservation Society, 48 Court St., Bristol, RI 02809.
- **Cranston:** Cranston Historical Society, Governor Sprague Mansion, 1351 Cranston St., Cranston, RI 02920; (401) 944-9226. <http://www.cranstonhistoricalsociety.org/>. Located in an historic house, the Cranston Historical Society offers programs, exhibits and has an archive.
- **Middletown:** Middletown Historical Society, P.O. Box 1496, Middletown, RI 02840. They have a collection of photographs, manuscripts, and oral history materials as well as documentation of the town's cemeteries.
- **Newport:** Newport Historical Society, 82 Touro St., Newport, RI 02840; (401) 846-0813. www.newporthistorical.org. This well-known historical society was founded in 1854. It is a research center for individuals interested in the genealogy and local history of the city. A guide to their collections appears in *Newport History* 69, nos. 239 and 240 (1998) 33-95.
- **Providence:** Rhode Island Historical Society Library, 121 Hope St., Providence, RI 02906; (401) 331-8575. <http://www.rihs.org/>. This privately owned and supported organization is the state's largest historical society. They maintain a wide variety of collections of interest to genealogists. The manuscripts and graphics departments are open by appointment only.
- **Westerly:** Westerly Historical Society, P.O. Box 91, Westerly, RI 02891. <http://www.westerlyhistoricalsociety.com/>. The Society offers genealogical services, conducts oral history projects, and organizes tours of the area.

Extensive efforts were taken to verify the information presented in this article. Please send corrections or additions to the author c/o The New England Historic and Genealogical Society, 101 Newbury St., Boston, MA 02116.

Footnotes

1. For a complete list of libraries in Rhode Island consult the American Library Association's *American Library Directory* (New Providence, N.J.: R. R. Bowker, 1999).