

A Few Basic Tools for Rhode Island Research

By Maureen A. Taylor

Before beginning to try to locate your Rhode Island ancestors, it is best to prepare a list of questions and develop a research strategy. There are several publications and online guides that can make the task easier and more productive. Let's examine how and why you would want to use these resources.

- [Rhode Island GenWeb Project](#)

The state pages of the United States GenWeb project are the responsibility of individuals who coordinate the content of the site on a county level. This site links users to message boards where researchers can share their knowledge and questions. Tired of searching for a cemetery stone? Look no further! This site now includes the Rhode Island Cemetery Transcription Project database so that you can look for that errant ancestor.

- *Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research, 4th ed.*, by Marcia Melnyk (Boston: NEHGS, 1999). This is the updated text of the same title by Marcia Wiswall Lindberg. Order online or contact the NEHGS Sales Department. The Rhode Island chapter is an up-to-date listing of facilities and their holdings. The section begins with a map of the state and a reference chart of the towns and their dates of formation.
- *Rhode Island: A Bibliography of its History*, by Roger Parks (Hanover, N. H.: University Press of New England, 1983). It is important to understand the historical context in which your ancestors lived. This volume directs family historians to articles and books of genealogical and historical interest. Many citations provide a brief description of the publication and an abbreviation of an institution where it was found. It is part of an ongoing series on each New England state that is being published under the auspices of the Committee for a New England Bibliography. This volume and the two additional supplements are available directly from the [University Press of New England](#).
- "Genealogical Research in Rhode Island," by Jane Fletcher Fiske, FASG, in *Genealogical Research in New England*, edited by Ralph Crandall (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1984) [originally printed serially in the *New England Historical and Genealogical Register* # 136 (1982): 173–219]. Fiske mentions resources that are overlooked by other, more general research outlines for the state. For instance, in the course of discussing church records, she highlights several published diaries of Rhode Island ministers that contain genealogical information. Although some records have been moved to other facilities since the article first appeared, this article is still relevant and useful for researchers, not least because it provides an invaluable historical overview of research in Rhode Island. The appendix is ready reference guide to town records and includes the incorporation date of towns and where their records are available. A bibliography of genealogies of Rhode Island families by Gary Boyd Roberts accompanies the article. This volume is available for use in the Society's Library and for loan through the NEHGS Circulating Library.
- *Research Outline: Rhode Island*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1997). Using a topical arrangement similar to the Family History Library Catalog, this small publication is easy to use and informative. Be sure to double-check the addresses listed in this publication -- not all are accurate. This guide is available online as a CD-ROM (as part of an LDS publication called Source Guide) for \$10.00, and in hard copy (item 31076) for \$.50 from the Church Distribution Center. Call 800-537-5950 or 5971 to order.
- *Ancestry's Red Book: American State, County, and Town Sources*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1992). If you need a quick summary of the history of the state and a general map of towns and county boundaries, then this is the source to use. Alice Eichholz has arranged the material by topic; each section includes a bibliographical essay. Two tables list the date of formation of each county and town and supply the mailing address for those who wish to send inquiries. Be aware, though, that many of the addresses listed in the bibliographic essays have changed. You may purchase this useful book through the NEHGS bookstore.
- *Rhode Island Sources for Family Historians and Genealogists*, by Kip Sperry (Logan, Utah: Everton Publishers, 1986). This book is best used as a bibliography of Rhode Island genealogy in print. Citations are arranged by topic. Although currently out of print, it can easily be consulted at most major genealogical libraries, including the NEHGS Library at 101 Newbury St. in Boston.

There are two publications relating to specific topics that should be consulted before planning Rhode Island research. In both cases the material covered in these items is not adequately discussed in any of the earlier mentioned works:

- *Rhode Island Colonial Records*, World Conference on Records and Genealogical Seminar, Area 1– 25, by Charles W. Farnham (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society, 1969; reprint, *Rhode Island History* 29 [1970]: 36–44). Over thirty years old, Farnham’s article is still the best overall guide to records created in the colony. He made an otherwise dry topic an interesting tale full of intrigue and information.
- *U.S. Military Records: A Guide to Federal and State Sources*, by James C. Neagles (Salt Lake City: Ancestry, 1994). If you are searching for a Rhode Island military ancestor, this book is a must. It is currently the only published resource of what military service information is obtainable in state facilities. This information is not currently available online through the Rhode Island State Archives because their Website is undergoing renovations. This volume is also available through the NEHGS bookstore.

If in doubt about what other published materials exist on specific Rhode Island topics, consult Parks’s bibliography, cited above, or the online catalog of the [Higher Education Library Information Network](#), or visit the NEHGS library.