

Summer Reading for Rhode Island Researchers, Part One

By Maureen A. Taylor

This summer when you head to the beach or on vacation, take along some relaxing reading to help with your genealogical research. In the last couple of years there has been a surprising number of new books relating to Rhode Island history and genealogy. There is something for every age and interest. This is only a sampling of the titles now available on Rhode Island - part two of this article will be published in the near future.

Down by the Old Mill Stream: Quilts in Rhode Island

Linda Welters and Margaret T. Ordonez, editors, Kent State University Press. 2000.

If you yearn to learn more about the lives of your female ancestors, then think about whether or not they made a quilt. This beautifully illustrated book, edited by two professors at the Department of Textiles, Fashion Merchandising and Design at the University of Rhode Island, is a resource for anyone trying to understand their female ancestors. *Down by the Old Mill Stream* examines the history of Rhode Island's textile industry and the women (and a few men) that made quilts. You will find descriptions of the fabrics and designs as well as additional information on these ancestral treasures. The book is in two parts: Part one discusses the historical and social context of quilting in Rhode Island while the latter half features an analysis of thirty quilts. This publication is part of the Rhode Island Quilt Documentation Project, a collaborative effort started in 1992 to research and document nearly 900 quilts in communities throughout Rhode Island.

Even if you don't own a family quilt, this book will inspire you to learn more about quilting so that you can leave your own legacy to your descendants. As a photo historian used to looking at black and white photographs of nineteenth-century families, this book helps me visualize the fabrics worn by individuals in these images. Don't forget to check the index to see if one of your ancestors is listed.

Mallet & Chisel: Gravestone Carvers of Newport, Rhode Island, in the Eighteenth Century

by Vincent F. Luti (Hardcover), New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2002.

This book is so much more than its title suggests. Vincent F. Luti, a retired professor emeritus of music theory at the University of Massachusetts, spent twenty years studying the gravestones of the Narragansett Basin of Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Luti compiled notes, made gravestone rubbings, and took photographs of stones engraved by a handful of carvers. Start with his [preface](#) for an explanation of what is covered and why he dedicated so much time to sorting out these carvers. This book is richly illustrated with photographs, charts, and sample engravings to help the layman understand the subtle symbols that appear in eighteenth-century gravestone carvings. Luti examines the John Stevens shop, a leading Newport maker of gravestones, defining and deciphering that family's dynasty as well as looking at an imitator.

There is so much to like about this book. The diagrams are easy to follow. An index contains a list of names of interest to genealogists. Three foldout charts at the back of the book list the carvings by individual and are broken down by stylistic elements. If you have ever walked through a historic cemetery and wondered about who made those stones, then this is a book for you. Gravestone scholars, genealogists, and social historians can thank Vincent Luti for uncovering so much new information and presenting it in this wonderful volume. Congratulations on a job well done!

The Wealth of Nations: A Peoples' History of Rhode Island

by Lisa Roseman Beade, Donald Breed, Marygael Cullen, Michelle Green (Hardcover), Community Communications in cooperation with The Rhode Island Historical Society and the Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce, 1999

The immigrant history of the state from the colonial period to the present is the focus of the first half of this lavishly illustrated volume. It includes the history of Native Americans in the state as well as photographs and information on each of the major ethnic groups that settled the area. The second half focuses on the different industries, businesses, educational institutions, and healthcare companies in the state today. Historical and contemporary photographs let you compare past and present Rhode Island.

Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960

by Gary Gerstle. Princeton University, 2001.

This is a new paperback version of the hardcover classic first published in 1989 by Cambridge University Press. This latest edition features a new preface by the author, who is Professor of History and Director of the Center for Historical Studies at the University of Maryland in College Park.

Gerstle used the records of the Independent Textile Union of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, to explore the concept of “Americanism” between World War I and the Cold War. There is plenty of information on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Woonsocket, particularly involving the large French Canadian community and the small number of Franco-Belgians in the area. According to Gerstle, these two groups “would significantly shape the city’s economy, culture, and politics.” This is a must read for anyone with roots in these two ethnic groups in northern Rhode Island.

Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England (Early American Studies)

by Ruth Wallis Herndon. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001

Ruth Wallis Herndon credits Phebe Perkins, an eighteenth-century woman from Hopkinton, Rhode Island, as her inspiration to seek out the hidden lives of the forty “unwelcome Americans” featured in this volume. These transient and poor individuals would be cross-examined by town councils after they arrived in towns seeking shelter. They were then sent on their way, only to repeat the process in the next town. If your ancestors in eighteenth-century Rhode Island are difficult to locate, you will want to follow Herndon’s methodology for finding individuals whose lives consisted of “living on the margin.” This is a fascinating read.

Fiction

I, Roger Williams

by Mary Lee Settle. W.W. Norton, 2001

I have to admit I wondered how an author could write a critically acclaimed novel about the founder of Providence, but Mary Lee Settle did it. Settle imaginatively wrote a fictional autobiography of Williams starting with his life in England, moving on to his employment as a secretary to Sir Edward Coke, his schooling at Cambridge, and his eventual immigration to New England. She uses milestones from his life to discuss the major historical events of the period. In order to involve readers in the seventeenth-century experience she wrote in the English appropriate for the time. *Booklist* commented that readers “will want to find out more about the people and events that Settle presents.” For genealogists with seventeenth-century Rhode Island ancestors, this offers a break from scholarly research.

Especially for Children

***Finding Providence: The Story of Roger Williams* (An I Can Read Chapter Book)**

by Avi, James Watling (Illustrator), Harper Trophy

Avi, a Rhode Island-based author, wrote this book for second and third grade students about the life of Roger Williams, starting with his expulsion from Massachusetts Bay in 1635. The narrator is Williams’s daughter who tells her father’s story through the events in his life: the trial in Boston, his escape into the wilderness, and his relationship with the Narragansett tribe. In this volume, the daughter is credited with naming Providence. While this is not a new book, it’s a classic for those young historians in your family.