Timeline of Rhode Island History

1636 - Roger Williams founds Providence to establish a colony based on religious freedom and a separation of Church and State. The land was bought from Narragansett sachem (chief) Canonicus.

1637 - Anne Hutchinson leads another group of people from Massachusetts to Aquidneck (Rhode) Island and helps found Portsmouth, which is then bought from the Narragansett tribe.

1672 - Touro Synagogue, the first synagogue in America, built in Newport due to the colony’s religious freedom.

1762 - Old State House built in Providence. Rhode Island’s government rotated between Providence, Newport, Bristol, East Greenwich, and Kingston from 1681 to 1854, when Newport and Providence became the only capitals. Providence became the only capital in 1901.

1764 - Brown University founded by people such as John Brown (a slave trader involved in the Triangle Trade) and his brother Moses Brown (a Quaker and important early abolitionist).

1776-1783 - American Revolution – Stephen Hopkins from Providence signed the Declaration of Independence and was governor of R.I 10 times. Nathanael Greene from Warwick became second-in-command of the Continental Army after George Washington. Gilbert Stuart from North Kingstown was a famous colonial painter and painted the portrait of George Washington that appears on the $1 bill.

1790 - Rhode Island Signs the Constitution. It was the last state to do so because Rhode Islanders disliked the lack of a Bill of Rights. Newport and Providence are the 8th and 9th largest cities in the country in 1790.

1841 - Dorr Rebellion, led by Thomas Dorr, happens in Rhode Island because many people are not allowed to vote.

1870s-1890s - Gilded Age - Newport becomes the most important summer destination for America’s richest families, many grand mansions are built there. Current State Capitol is built out of white marble between 1891 and 1904 because of R.I.’s growing population.

1892 - Slater Mill is founded in Pawtucket by Samuel Slater. It is the first successful water-powered cotton mill in America and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the US.

1900s - Preservation Movement begins, the R.I. Preservation Commission is created, and Rhode Islanders work to protect the state’s historic places for future generations.

1929 - Great Depression hurts Rhode Island’s textile industry and many factories close.

1938 - Hurricane of 1938 destroys many homes across Rhode Island.