

Rhode Island History on United States Postal Stationery

This exhibit will show the United States Postal Stationery related to Rhode Island. In the process it will give a bit of the history and factual information about our smallest state.

Background Information on Rhode Island

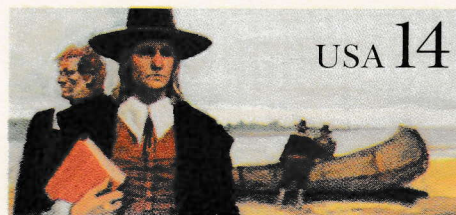
The official name of what we know as Rhode Island is *State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. It is the smallest state in the union by area covering 1,214 square miles of which 1,045 square miles are land. It is the 8th least populous state and the 2nd most densely populated. It is bordered on the west by Connecticut, on the north and east by Massachusetts, and on the south by the Atlantic Ocean where it also shares a border with New York.

Brown University was founded in Providence in 1764 by several of the religious and political leaders of the colony as a sanctuary for religious and intellectual beliefs.

Rhode Island was the first colony to break its allegiance with Great Britain and the fourth colony to sign the Articles of Confederation. It boycotted the Constitutional Convention to draft the U.S. Constitution after the Articles of Confederation were found to be wanting. Rhode Island was adamantly opposed to a strong central government. It was the last of the original 13 colonies to ratify the U.S. Constitution and then only after the promise of a Bill of Rights restricting the power of the national government.

Settling of Rhode Island

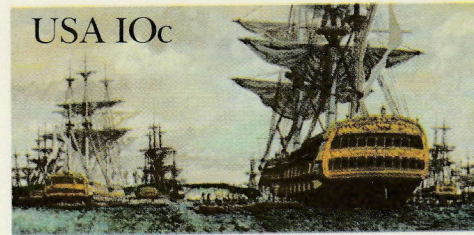
This postal card (issued in 1986) commemorates the 350th anniversary of the settling of Rhode Island by Roger Williams who had been expelled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Williams was a teacher and theologian. He was expelled due to theological differences, interesting given that the settlers in the Massachusetts area were fleeing religious persecution in Europe. Prior to settlement by Europeans, the area was home to the Narragansett Indians. It features pilgrims (presumably Roger Williams) landing on the shores of Rhode Island.



Settling of Rhode Island, 1636

Landing of Rochambeau, 1780

His full name was Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau. He was appointed commander of the French land forces sent to assist General Washington in his fight for independence. He led 7,000 French troops. They landed at Newport, RI in 1780. See postal card (issued in 1980) below. Rochambeau and his troops remained in the area for about a year in support of the French fleet being blockaded by the British. He left RI in 1781 joining his force with Washington's in Mount Kisco, NY. Together they marched south and joined with Marquis de Lafayette's troops at Yorktown. Together and with the support of the Chesapeake Bay blockade they forced Lord Cornwallis to surrender, pretty much ending the Revolutionary War.



Landing of Rochambeau, 1780

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Nathanael Greene and the Battle of Eutaw Springs, 1781

General Nathanael Greene, born in Potowomut, Rhode Island, was leading the American forces in the south. He had determined to force the British out of the back country in the area. Green's forces engaged the British at the Battle of Eutaw Springs which became the last major battle fought in the Carolinas. The battle ended in a British tactical victory, but an American strategic victory as the British were forced out of the back country and limited to Savannah, Charleston, and Wilmington. This battle is commemorated on the card shown below which was issued in 1981.

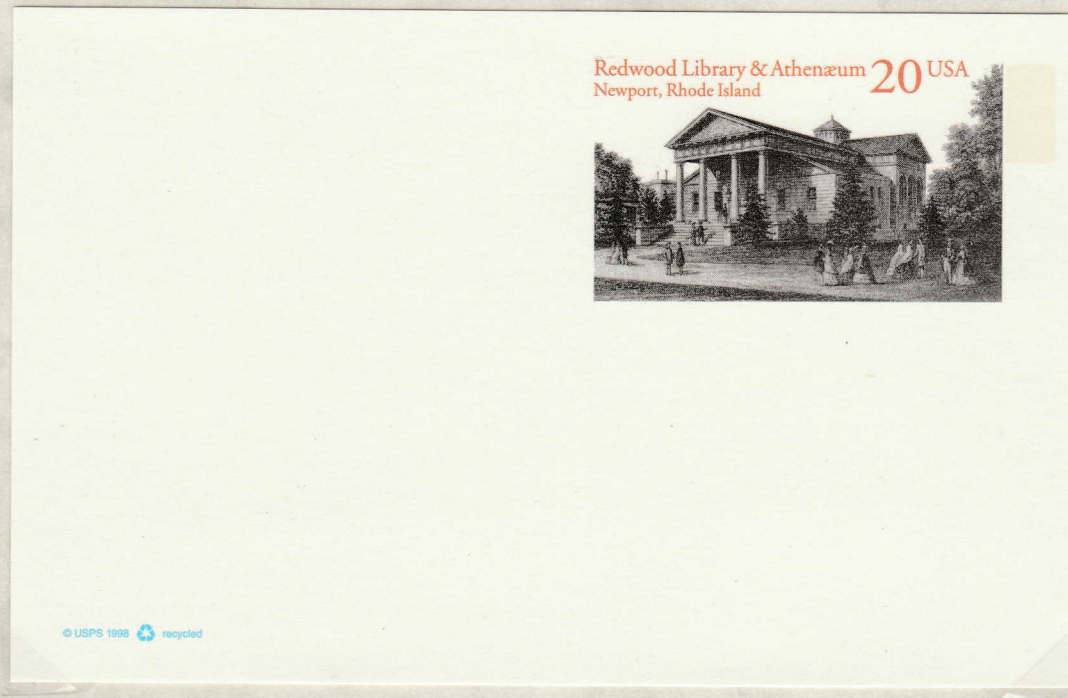


Nathanael Greene, Eutaw Springs, 1781

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Redwood Library & Athenaeum

When I first saw the title of this postal card, issued in 1999, my first question was what is an athenaeum? I'm guessing that many of you are in the same boat, but maybe I'm not giving you enough credit. Anyway for those of you that are wondering Webster defines athenaeum as "a building or room in which books, periodicals, and newspapers are kept for use." Webster also provides a second definition which is "a literary or scientific association." The Redwood Library was first chartered in 1747 and opened in 1750 making it the first lending library to be chartered and opened in the colonies. Currently it still occupies the same building making it the oldest library in the U.S. still occupying its original building. It was founded as a library and during the Revolutionary War it took a beating along with the rest of Newport. Citizens cried out for help maintaining the facility. As one article I read says "help arrived in the form of one word – Athenaeum." A broader array of material was added to the library, things like art, music, and thoughtful exchange of ideas. In 1833 The Redwood Library was re-initiated as The Redwood Library & Athenaeum and it remains as such today.



Block Island Lighthouse

Block Island Lighthouse sits on Mohegan Bluffs on Block Island some 12 miles off the coast of Rhode Island. It has been warning mariners of the dangers in the area since it was first lit in 1874. It stands 67 feet tall and is considered one of the nation's most architecturally sophisticated lighthouses built in that era. The site became a national historic landmark in 1997. It was commemorated on this 20-cent postal card, issued in 1999 and shown below.



America's Cup Yacht Racing

So far we have only seen postal cards. The last item I want to cover is the one postal stationary item featuring a Rhode Island related theme. That is the America's Cup envelope, issued in 1980. The first America's Cup was won by the American yacht "America" in 1851 in a race hosted by the Royal Yacht Squadron around the Isle of Wight. It was named after the yacht that first won the trophy. The trophy was presented to the New York Yacht Club after it won the 1857 challenge with the understanding it would be a traveling trophy going to the yacht club that last won the race. It was held by the New York Yacht Club for the next 126 years until 1983 when it was won by the Royal Perth Yacht Club. This ended the longest winning streak in the history of sport. So what does all this have to do with Rhode Island? Well, Rhode Island hosted the America's Cup races from 1930 to 1983. This fits in well with the state's seafaring traditions.



I hope that you have enjoyed our trip to Rhode Island, nicknamed the "Ocean State." Obviously there is much more to learn about Rhode Island than what we have covered here, but this is a start and gives you a flavor for how big a heart our smallest state has. From religious leaders like Roger Williams to Revolutionary War leaders like Nathanael Greene. Its seafaring traditions like the landing of Rochambeau to the America's Cup host for some 50 plus years. From its architecture on display in structures like the Block Island Lighthouse to its love of the arts in the Redwood Library and Athenaeum. This state may be small in stature, but it has been big in its contributions to our country over the years. If you are interested in learning more about Rhode Island through philately consider exploring the 18 or so stamps issued by the U.S. that commemorate Rhode Island related people, culture, and events.