

Welcome to the Rhode Island State House. Overlooking downtown Providence from Smith Hill, the State House is the center of Rhode Island government. It was designed by the renowned New York firm of McKim, Mead & White in 1891-94 and constructed between 1895 and 1904. Built of white Georgia marble, its façade is dominated by the fourth largest self-supported marble dome in the world. The largest such dome is on St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City, followed by those on the Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul, and the Taj Mahal in Agra, India. The State House is considered an outstanding example of American Renaissance architecture. As in 16th century Italian Renaissance architecture, this style reflects those of ancient Greece and Rome, appropriate models for a building dedicated to representative democracy.

FIRST FLOOR

The north vestibule serves as the primary entrance to the State House. Standing near the entrance doors, note the shape of the room and the narrowing width of the staircases. This funneling design accentuates the contrast experienced when ascending the stairs to the voluminous space of the rotunda ahead. The entrance is flanked by two cannons. The cannon on the left 1 was used by the First R.I. Light Artillery and damaged during the battle of Gettysburg on July 3, 1863. A cannonball still remains lodged in its barrel. Opposite is another cannon from the same regiment used during the Battle of Bull Run, outside Washington, D.C. on July 21, 1861. Glass cases in the north and south vestibules once held battle flags 2 carried by Rhode Island regiments from the American Revolution through World War I. The flags have been removed for assessment and conservation and have been replaced by photographs. The south vestibule also contains a replica of the Liberty Bell. 3

Embedded in the rotunda floor is a bronze replica of Rhode Island’s state seal 4 with the state’s original name, “State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.” However in 2020, Rhode Islanders voted to remove “Providence Plantations” from the name, so the current name is simply “State of Rhode Island.” Rhode Island’s legislature adopted the anchor and “Hope” as the colony’s symbol and motto in the 17th century.

High within the rotunda is a beautiful mural with scenes from Rhode Island history. It features Narragansett sachems Canonicus and Miantonomi, colonial founder Roger Williams, the origins of religious freedom, and Rhode Island’s leadership in the Industrial Revolution.

THIRD FLOOR

Here visitors are allowed a closer view of the rotunda, 6 7 8 as well as access to the public galleries for the House and Senate chambers.



EXTERIOR FEATURES

Famous throughout the state and symbolic of Rhode Island’s independent spirit, the “Independent Man” stands on top of the dome grasping a spear in one hand and resting the other on the stock of an anchor. Originally titled *Hope* by its creator George Brewster, the sculpture was nicknamed “Independent Man” shortly after it was installed. Above the south entrance, facing the city of Providence and Narragansett Bay, is a quotation from the Royal Charter of 1663 which eloquently summarizes the spirit of Rhode Island from its founding to the present day:

To hold forth a lively experiment that a most flourishing civil state may stand and best be maintained with full liberty in religious concernsments.

On the entablature above the North Entry is inscribed a state chronology:

PROVIDENCE•PLANTATIONS•FOUNDED•BY•ROGER•WILLIAMS•1636  
PROVIDENCE•PORTSMOUTH•NEWPORT•INCORPORATED•BY•PARLIAMENT•1643  
RHODE•ISLAND•AND•PROVIDENCE•PLANTATIONS•OBTAINED•ROYAL•CHARTER•1663  
IN•GENERAL•ASSEMBLY•DECLARED•A•SOVEREIGN•STATE•MAY•4•1776

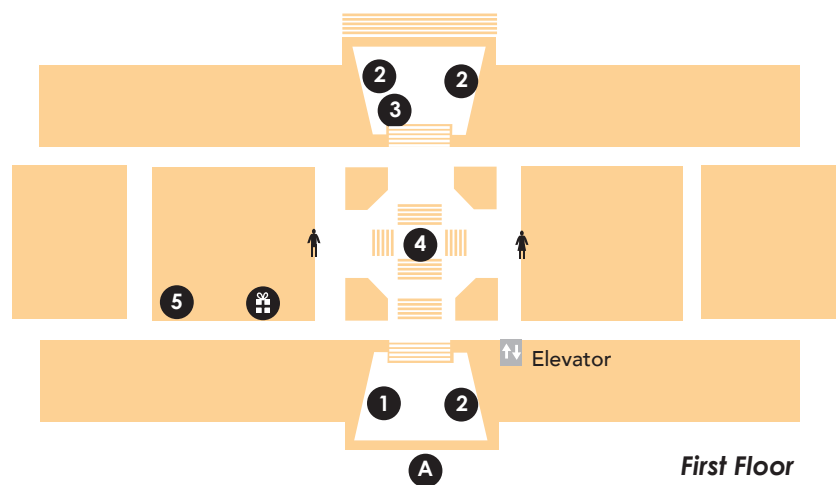
- Entrance and parking are located off Smith Street in the Legislator parking lots.
  - Public restrooms are located on all occupied floors.
- A café is located in the basement level and open Monday through Friday.  
A Visitor Center and Gift Shop is located on the first floor, Room 140, and open Monday through Friday, 9 am-3:30 pm.
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Cover: Rhode Island State House at Dawn - Photo Credit: Warren Jagger Photography



The Rhode Island State House

A self-guided tour



- A** North (Smith St.) Entry
  - 1** Gettysburg Gun
  - 2** Battle Flags
  - 3** Liberty Bell
  - 4** State Seal
  - 5** Royal Charter Museum
  - 6** RI History Mural
  - 7** Tacitus Inscription
  - 8** Medallions
  - 9** Senate Chamber
  - 10** State Reception Room
  - 11** Washington Portrait
  - 12** House Chamber
  - 13** Library
  - 14** Printers' Marks
  -  Visitor Center and Gift Shop
  -  Women's Room
  -  Men's Room

Encircling the interior base of the dome, in raised gold letters on a blue background, is a Latin inscription from the writings of first century Roman historian Tacitus <sup>7</sup>. The quotation embodies the spirit expressed by Rhode Island's founders, and is translated as:

The large medallions **8** on the four corners of the dome's support structure feature allegorical female figures depicting Education, Justice, Literature, and Commerce.

[illegible]

The Senate Chamber <sup>9</sup> is home to the 38 members of the Senate. The design of the room was almost surely influenced by the Pantheon in Rome, and has been restored to its original colors and finishes. On the archway above the rostrum are the seals of the original thirteen states, with Rhode Island's in the center. Roughly cubic in proportion, the room is 56 feet wide, 44 feet long and 45 feet high. There is one public gallery in the Senate, which is reached from the third floor, above the rostrum.

The State Reception Room **10** is part of the Governor's office and serves as the formal reception area for many official functions. With its ornately gilded ceiling, gold-crowned marble pilasters, large fireplaces and crystal chandelier, it is the most ornate room in the building. The French doors open out onto the Governor's Balcony. From here, the Chief Sheriff, dressed in early 19th century garb, reads the *Proclamation of Election of the Governor* on Inauguration Day. It is followed by a 19-gun salute on the State House lawn.



Directly opposite the Senate is the House Chamber. **12** It is home to the 75 members of the House of Representatives. Larger and more decorative than the Senate, the House Chamber is 56 feet in length and width, and is 45 feet high. Each Representative has a solid oak desk. Behind the Speaker's rostrum is the House Lounge. Visitors may have access to this and the similar Senate Lounge only with an official guide. The House Chamber has two public galleries reached from the third floor.

The State Library **13** is part of the Secretary of State's office and is open to the public. Its collections date back to 1750 and focus on the legislative history of Rhode Island and the United States. The librarians assist legislators, their staff, and the general public with research questions and information about state government.

The Library ceiling was designed to look like the back of a leather-bound book. The 16 circles around its perimeter **14** are European printer's marks from the 15th-17th centuries. Visitors are often surprised to learn that the Library's stairways and catwalk supports are iron, painted to look like the rest of its mahogany interior. There are two special exhibits on view in the Library: the first is a display of moon rocks and a miniature Rhode Island flag, souvenirs from the first manned lunar landing in 1969; the second is a selection of items from the Rhode Island State Archives.

