



Foundation Document Overview

Roger Williams National Memorial

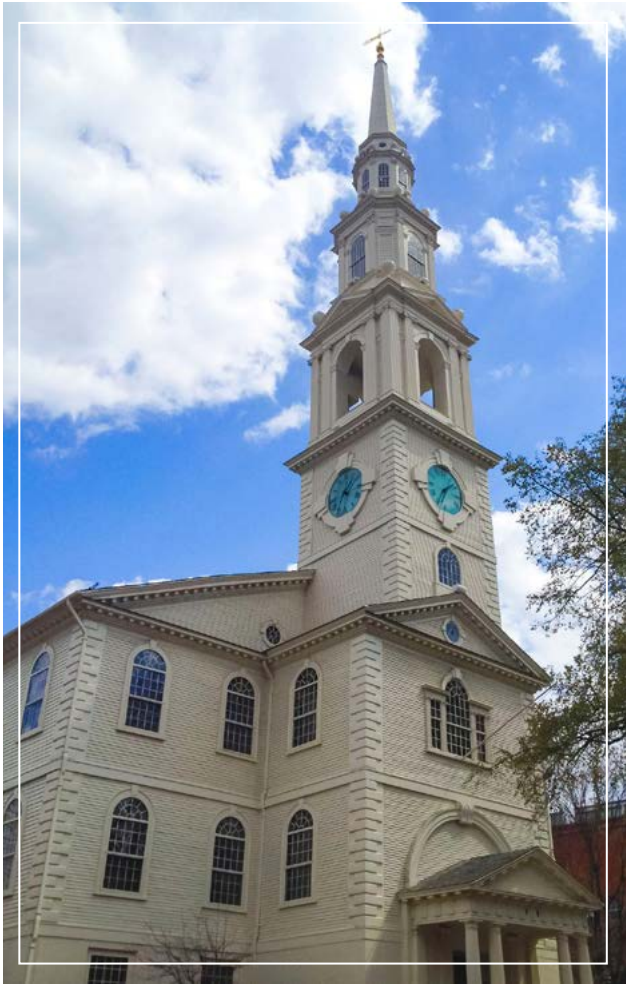
Rhode Island



Contact Information

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Purpose



The purpose of ROGER WILLIAMS NATIONAL MEMORIAL is to commemorate and educate the public about Roger Williams and his ideal of Liberty of Conscience, a fundamental principle of American democracy related to religious freedom, the separation of church and state, and individual rights; and to protect and interpret the traditional site of the old town spring, where Roger Williams founded Rhode Island and created a civil society in Providence based upon this principle.

Significance

Significance statements express why Roger Williams National Memorial resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- The principles of religious freedom and individual liberty, which Roger Williams advanced, have been fundamental and contested issues in the development of the American nation.
- Providence and the Rhode Island Colony was the earliest example of the separation between church and state in English America.



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Memorial Site of Roger Williams Spring**
- **Antram-Gray House**
- **Site for Dialogue/Reflection on Freedom of Religion/Expression**

Roger Williams National Memorial contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Cultural Landscape of Roger Williams National Memorial**
- **Commemorative Markers and Plaques**
- **Archeological Resources**
- **Historical and Archeological Collections**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Champion of Individual Rights.** Roger Williams introduced the concept of religious freedom in the English colonies, establishing the constitutional precedents for the separation of church and state and individual liberties in America.
- **“The Lively Experiment.”** Expelled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Roger Williams led the creation of a new colony, Rhode Island, where he actualized his ideas about government, religion, and freedom.
- **Relationship Between Colonists and Indian Tribes.** Roger Williams National Memorial illuminates the complex relations, ranging from amicable to hostile, between English colonists and Indian tribes in 17th-century New England as well as the ongoing historical understanding of those relations.
- **Memorialization.** American society has valued the ideas and sites associated with Roger Williams differently over time, reflecting changing societal values, social movements, and evolving ethics of memorialization and resource stewardship.



Description

Roger Williams National Memorial is a small urban park (4.58 acres), established by Congress to commemorate the founder of Rhode Island and his significant contributions to the principles of individual freedom in the United States. The park is located at 282 North Main Street, at the foot of College Hill in downtown Providence. Roger Williams arrived in what he called Providence in 1636, attracted by the presence of a freshwater spring. Here, he laid out a settlement and established its government that ensured freedom of religion through the separation of church and state. Williams built his house across the street from the spring and lived there on and off until his death in 1683.

During the subsequent three centuries, the spring—later recognized as a symbolic wellspring for both Rhode Island and the concept of religious freedom in the United States—became hidden by urban development. The spring was revealed in the early 20th century and was enshrined within Roger Williams National Memorial, which was designated in 1965 and was substantially completed in 1982. Although mostly a contemporary resource, the park, with its winding paths, open lawns, and groves of trees, includes an early-20th-century municipal memorial plaque to Isaac Hahn, the first person of the Jewish faith to hold public office in Providence. On the North Main Street side of the Hahn Memorial are two bronze plaques.

One commemorates Roger Williams; the other, Isaac Hahn. The park also includes the 18th-century Antram-Gray House, which was moved 40 feet south onto an empty lot that had been cleared as an urban renewal project in 1974. The Antram-Gray House houses a visitor center with exhibits, a video, and a bookstore, as well as administrative offices. The park hosted 60,505 visitors in 2015.

