Rhode Island Chronology, 1772–1790

1772
9–10 June  H.M.S. *Gaspee* revenue schooner burned off the coast of Warwick

1773
January, May–June  Witnesses boycott hearings on the burning of the *Gaspee*

1774
17 May  Providence Town Meeting calls for a continental congress
15 June  Legislature appoints delegates to First Continental Congress
12 December  H.M.S. *Rose* arrives in R.I. to suppress smuggling

1775
2 March  Providence Tea Party burns tea in Market Square
25 April  Legislature votes to raise “Army of Observation” (1,500 men)
7 May  Nathanael Greene given command of “Army of Observation”
May–June  Legislature replaces Loyalist governor-elect
15 June  Legislature creates state navy
26 August  Legislature asks First Continental Congress to establish a navy

1776
4 May  Legislature instructs R.I. delegates to Congress to work for a Union and to fight to preserve liberty
19 July  Legislature ratifies Declaration of Independence
8 December  British occupy Newport

1778
16 February  Legislature instructs delegates to Second Continental Congress to sign Articles of Confederation and to submit three proposed amendments
23 June  Congress rejects R.I.’s proposed amendments
9 July  R.I. delegates to Congress sign Articles of Confederation
29 August  Battle of Rhode Island concludes unsuccessful siege of Newport

1779
25 October  British evacuate Newport

1780
10 July  French fleet and troops arrive in Newport
RHODE ISLAND CHRONOLOGY, 1772–1790

1782
1 November  House of Deputies unanimously rejects Impost of 1781

1783
6 March  Legislature admits Roman Catholics to rights of citizenship

1784
1 March  R.I. law for the gradual abolition of slavery goes into effect

March  House of Deputies rejects 1783 Confederation amendment to apportion federal expenses by population
5 March  Legislature adopts Impost of 1783 with qualifications
5 March  Legislature adopts 1784 grant of temporary power for Congress to regulate commerce
2 November  Legislature adopts for a second time 1784 grant of temporary power for Congress to regulate commerce

1785
3 March  Congress requests R.I. to revise its 1784 grant of temporary commercial power for Congress
4 March  Legislature adopts Impost of 1783
15 March  Legislature revises previous adoption of 1784 grant of temporary commercial power for Congress
19 April  Country party wins control of state government in annual state elections
6 May  Legislature passes paper-money act
28 June, 1 July  Legislature appoints commissioners to Annapolis Convention
30 June  Legislature passes first penalty act
26 August  Legislature passes second penalty act
13 September  Smithfield Convention of Providence County towns proposes radical state trade system
26 September  Superior Court decides *Trevett v. Weeden*
7 October  Legislature asks town meetings to instruct deputies on draft test act
1 November  House of Deputies reads instructions on test act indicating freemen overwhelmingly oppose the act

1786
3 March  Congress requests R.I. to revise its 1784 grant of temporary commercial power for Congress
4 March  Legislature adopts Impost of 1783
15 March  Legislature revises previous adoption of 1784 grant of temporary commercial power for Congress
19 April  Country party wins control of state government in annual state elections
6 May  Legislature passes paper-money act
28 June, 1 July  Legislature appoints commissioners to Annapolis Convention
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1787
1 March  Legislative committee estimates state’s debt to be £153,000
12–17 March  Legislature rejects sending delegates to Constitutional Convention
17 March  Legislature begins redeeming first part of state debt in quarterly installments
18 April  Country party landslide in annual state elections
2–5 May  Legislature rejects sending delegates to Constitutional Convention
25 May–17 September  Constitutional Convention meets without R.I. being represented
RHODE ISLAND CHRONOLOGY, 1772–1790

11–16 June  Legislature rejects sending delegates to Constitutional Convention
20–22 August Legislature fails to obtain a quorum
15 September Legislature adopts letter to Congress giving reasons for not sending delegates to Constitutional Convention
17 September Newport and Providence deputies protest legislative letter to Congress
17 September Governor John Collins sends legislative letter and protest to Congress
31 October Legislature prohibits foreign slave trade by R.I. citizens
3 November Legislature rejects calling a state convention, but votes to print copies of Constitution for distribution to towns

1788

14 February News of Massachusetts ratification with recommendatory amendments first printed in R.I.
29 February House of Deputies defeats motion for a state convention, 43–15
1 March Legislature passes act submitting Constitution to referendum of freemen in town meetings
24 March Freemen in town meetings vote against Constitution, 2,714–238
2 April House of Deputies defeats motion for a state convention by a majority of 27
5 April Legislature adopts letter to President of Congress explaining referendum results
16 April Country party again wins annual state elections
7–10 May Legislative session takes no action on the Constitution
14 June Motion for a state convention is “not noticed” by House of Deputies
24 June News reaches R.I. of New Hampshire’s ratification
27 June Providence resolves to celebrate the adoption of the Constitution by nine states and the anniversary of American independence on Fourth of July
3–4 July Antifederalist threats of violence and Providence celebration
5 July News reaches R.I. of Virginia’s ratification
29 July News reaches R.I. of New York’s ratification
21 August News reaches R.I. of North Carolina Convention’s adjournment without ratifying the Constitution
1 November Legislature begins redeeming second part of state debt in quarterly installments
1 November House of Deputies defeats motion for a state convention, 40–14
1 November Legislature orders New York Convention’s circular letter and amendments sent to towns for their consideration
22 November–
29 December Town meetings consider New York circular letter

1789

1 January Legislature reviews instructions from towns on New York circular letter
1 January House of Deputies rejects motion for a state convention, 34–12
4 March New Constitution goes into effect without R.I. in the Union
13 March House of Deputies rejects motion for a state convention, 36–19
15 April Country party wins annual state elections
9 May Legislature postpones motion for a state convention until its June session
11 June House of Deputies rejects motion for a state convention by a majority of 11
27, 28 August Providence and Newport petitions to Congress asking exemption from payment of foreign tonnage duties
September Entire state debt redeemed or forfeited
18 September Legislature asks freemen in town meetings on 19 October to vote on calling a state convention
19 September Legislature temporarily suspends tender provision of paper-money act of 1786
19 September Legislature approves letter to President and Congress asking for exemption from foreign duties
19 September Gov. John Collins sends legislative letter to President and Congress
2 October President George Washington transmits amendments to Constitution proposed by Congress to state executives, including Gov. Collins
15 October Legislature orders congressional amendments to Constitution printed and sent to towns for their 19 October meetings
17 October Legislature repeals tender provision of paper-money act of 1786 and allows real estate and personal property to be used to repay debts
19 October Town meetings instruct deputies on calling a state convention
29 October House of Deputies defeats motion for a state convention, 39–17
12 December News of North Carolina’s ratification first printed in R.I.

15–17 January Legislature considers bills calling a state convention
16 January House of Deputies votes to call a state convention, 32–11
17 January Gov. John Collins breaks tie vote in House of Magistrates to call a state convention
17 January Legislature orders act calling a state convention to be sent to Congress with a request for further commercial indulgences
2 February Antifederalist convention held at East Greenwich to influence state convention elections
8 February Election of delegates to state convention
1–6 March State Convention meets in South Kingstown
6 March Convention votes 41–28 to adjourn until May
6 March Convention sends proposed bill of rights and amendments to towns for their consideration on 21 April
6 March Antifederalist “nocturnal convention” proposes election prox with Daniel Owen as candidate for governor

18 March Antifederalist convention substitutes Arthur Fenner for Daniel Owen

6 April Federalist convention held at East Greenwich proposes a coalition prox

21 April Country party wins annual state election

21 April–1 May Town meetings deliberate on R.I.’s proposed bill of rights and amendments

8 May Gov. Arthur Fenner, in council, states he will call a special session of legislature if Convention ratifies Constitution

18 May U.S. Senate passes bill discriminating against R.I. in commerce

20 May Gov. Fenner writes to President George Washington indicating R.I. will soon ratify

25–29 May R.I. state Convention meets in Newport

29 May R.I. Convention ratifies Constitution, 34–32

29 May Convention recommends that the state legislature should adopt congressional amendments

29 May Convention President Daniel Owen informs President Washington of R.I.’s ratification

29 May News arrives in Providence of R.I. ratification at 11:00 p.m.

1 June President Washington transmits word to Congress of R.I.’s ratification


4 June President Washington congratulates Gov. Fenner on R.I. ratification

9 June Convention President Owen sends President Washington official form of ratification

10 June Officers at legislative session take oath to Constitution

11 June Adoption of 11 of 12 congressional amendments

12 June Legislature passes election bill

12 June Legislature elects Joseph Stanton, Jr., and Theodore Foster as U.S. Senators

12 June Legislature orders Gov. Fenner to issue proclamation notifying all state officers to take oath to Constitution

14 June Gov. Fenner issues proclamation on oaths

14 June Congress passes act putting federal tariff into effect in R.I.

16 June President Washington transmits official R.I. form of ratification to Congress

25 June R.I. Senators take their seats

17–19 August President Washington’s entourage visits R.I.

31 August Towns vote for R.I.’s U.S. Representative

9 September Legislature declares Benjamin Bourne elected U.S. Representative