



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 and White in 1891-94 and constructed between 1895 and 1904. Built of white Georgia marble, its facade is dominated by the fourth largest self-supporting marble covered dome in the world. The largest is that of St. Peter's in Vatican City, followed by the domes of the Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul and the Taj Mahal in Agra, India. The State House is considered an outstanding example of the American Renaissance architecture style. As in 16th century Renaissance architecture, this style reflects that of ancient Greece and Rome, an appropriate model for a building dedicated to representative democracy.

FIRST FLOOR

The north vestibule serves as the primary entrance of the State House. Standing near the entrance doors, note the shape of the room and the narrowing width of the staircases. This funneling design serves to accentuate the contrast experienced when ascending the stairs to the voluminous space of the rotunda ahead. On the left is the Gettysburg gun **1** from the First R.I. Light Artillery, damaged during the battle of Gettysburg on July 3, 1863. A cannonball still remains lodged in the 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 within the north and south vestibules contain the battle flags **2** carried by Rhode Island regiments from the Revolutionary War through World War I. The south vestibule also contains a replica of the Liberty Bell. **3**

Embedded in the rotunda floor is a bronze replica of the State seal **4** containing an anchor and the word, "HOPE," the State motto. High within the rotunda is a beautiful mural of Roger Williams colonizing Providence Plantations surrounded by fellow colonists and natives, including Narragansett Sachem Canonicus.

It is considered a marvel of arching perspective and detail.

Encircling the interior base of the dome, in raised gold letters on a blue background, is a Latin inscription **7** from the writings



◀ (over)

THIRD FLOOR

Here visitors are allowed a closer view of the rotunda murals, **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 its citizens' heritage, the Independent Man stands atop the dome clutching a spear in one hand and resting the other on the stock of an anchor. The origin of the name, "Independent Man," is not clear. Originally, the figure atop the dome was to have been a statue of Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island. But no one could agree on what Roger Williams looked like, so the idea was vetoed. However, it was from those debates that the idea for the Independent Man seems to have originated. Above the South Entry, facing the City of Providence and Narragansett Bay, is inscribed this quotation from the Royal Charter of 1663. It 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 concerns.

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

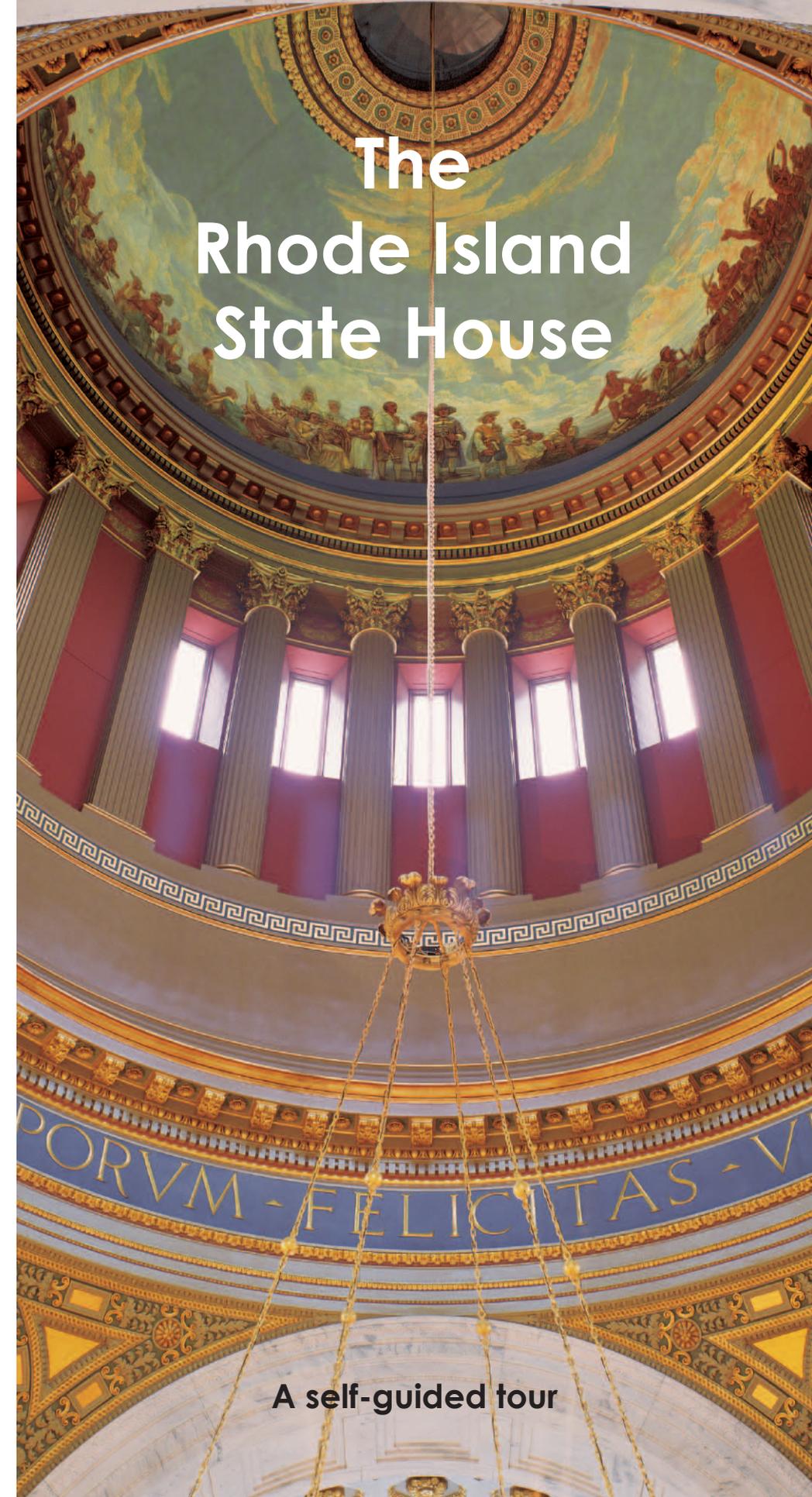
- Entrance and parking are located off Smith Street in the Legislator parking lots.
- Public restrooms are located on all occupied floors.

A cafeteria is located in the basement level and open Monday through Friday. A Visitor Center is located on the first floor, room 140, and open Monday through Friday 8:30 am - 4:30 pm.

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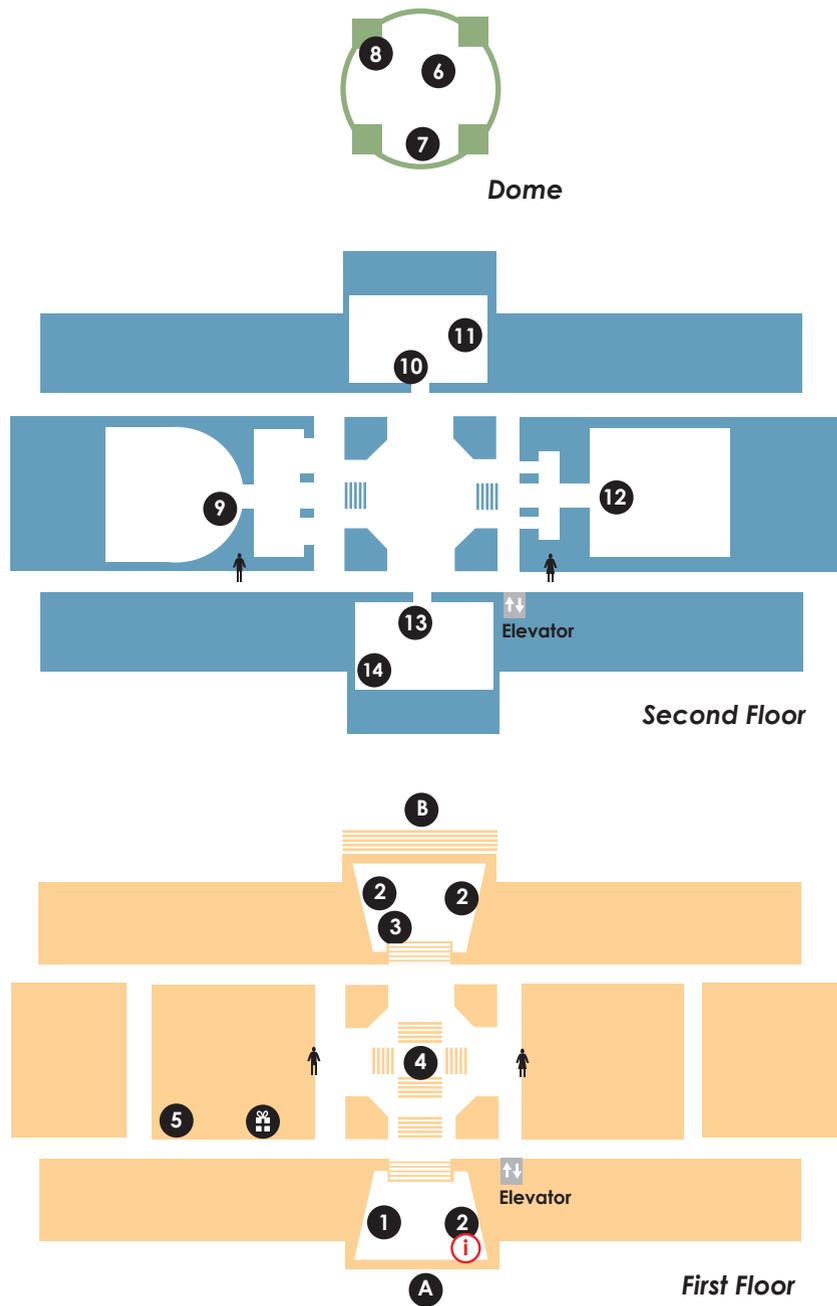
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Cover: Dome Mural - Photo Credit: Warren Jagger Photography



The Rhode Island State House

A self-guided tour



- A** North (Smith St.) Entry
- B** South (Downtown) Entry
- 1** Gettysburg Gun
- 2** Battle Flags
- 3** Liberty Bell
- 4** State Seal
- 5** Royal Charter Museum
- 6** Roger Williams Mural
- 7** Tacitus Inscription
- 8** Pendentive Murals
- 9** Senate Chamber
- 10** State Reception Room
- 11** Washington Portrait
- 12** House Chamber
- 13** Library
- 14** Printers' Marks
- i** Information Desk
- ♀** Women's Room
- ♂** Men's Room

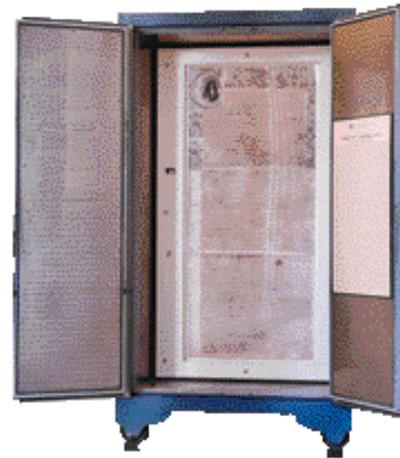
FIRST FLOOR *continued*

of first century Roman historian Tacitus. The quotation embodies the spirit expressed by Rhode Island's founders, and is translated as:

"Rare felicity of the times when it is permitted to think what you like and say what you think."

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

Also on the first floor (northeast corridor) is the Royal Charter Museum. **5** The Charter Museum contains many priceless documents and artifacts that represent Rhode Island's important place in history. The centerpiece of the Museum - the Royal Charter of 1663 granted by King Charles II of England, resides in a custom steel vault. The Charter guaranteed Rhode Island settlers freedom of religion and the freedom to govern their own colony. The Charter is in the care of the Secretary of State, who has been the keeper of records since colonial times.



For many years this document had been attached to a piece of cardboard at the back of the vault. But because it is written on parchment (sheep or goat skin), it needs to expand and contract, just like your own skin. In 1996, conservators removed the Charter from the cardboard, and devised a new storage system. If you look closely, you can see that the Charter is suspended on threads, which now allow the parchment to expand and contract.

SECOND FLOOR

The Senate Chamber **9** is home to the 38 members of the Senate. The design of the room was almost surely influenced by the Pantheon in Rome, and was recently 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. It serves as the formal reception area for many official functions. With its ornately gilded high ceiling, gold-crowned marble pilasters, two large fireplaces and crystal chandelier, it is indeed a fitting place for important ceremonies. The room also



contains many Rhode Island historical artifacts. The crowning glory of this collection is the famous Gilbert Stuart portrait of George Washington in an elaborate gilded frame. **11** Completed in 1802, Washington is shown standing in front of a symbolic rural landscape. Stuart, a Rhode Islander, was considered the leading portrait artist in America during Revolutionary times. Opposite the Stuart portrait hangs a large painting by Gari Melchers of Major General Nathanael Greene, the Rhode Islander who was Washington's second-in-command during the American Revolution. The room features large French doors that open out onto what is known as the Governor's Balcony. Every Inauguration Day, the Chief Sheriff, dressed in early 19th century garb, reads the formal Proclamation of Election of the Governor, followed by a 19-gun salute on the State House lawn.

Directly opposite the Senate is the House Chamber. **12** It is the home to the 75 members of the House of Representatives. Larger and more decorative than the Senate, the House Chamber is 56 feet by 56 feet 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 House Library **13** is a beautifully decorated three-tiered room with an ornate coved ceiling. It is embellished with gold-leaf and plaster reproductions of printer's marks. **14** These 16 marks, which adorn the borders of the State Library ceiling, are copies of marks of famous printers who worked at their craft in Europe from about 1474 to 1620. The Library, part of the Secretary of State's office, is open to the public and specializes in legislative history, laws and research. The Library serves the members and staff of the General Assembly by locating information useful to them, and acts as a source of information for the public about the Assembly and its operations, as well as State government in general. The Library also houses official documents and records of the United States and other states to which legislators may refer in the course of their duties. It also contains books and pamphlets relating to Rhode Island history.

