

Bristol, RI

Bristol is a town in the historic county seat of Bristol County, Rhode Island, United States. The population was 22,469 at the 2000 census. Bristol, a deepwater seaport, is named after Bristol, England.

Major industries include boat building (and related marine industries), manufacturing and tourism. The town's school system is united with neighboring Warren, Rhode Island. Prominent ethnic minorities include Portuguese-Americans, mostly Azorean, and Italian-Americans.

History of Bristol

The first battle of King Philip's War took place here in 1675; although Philip was eventually defeated, a variant of his Indian name, Metacomet, is now the shortened name of a main road in Bristol: Metacom Avenue (RI Route 136).

King Philip made nearby Mount Hope (Montaup) his base of operations. "King Philip's Chair", a rocky ledge on the mountain, was a lookout site for enemy ships on Mount Hope Bay. After that war concluded, the town was settled in 1680 as part of Plymouth Colony. It was named after Bristol, England and was sold for £1100 to four Boston investors by the names of Byfield, Walley, Oliver, and Burton. It remained a part of Massachusetts until the British Crown transferred it to the Rhode Island Colony in 1747.

The DeWolf family was among the earliest settlers of Bristol. Bristol and Rhode Island became a center of slave trading. James DeWolf, a leading slave trader, later become a United States Senator from Rhode Island. Quakers from Rhode Island were involved early in the abolition movement.

During the American Revolutionary War, the British attacked Bristol twice. On October 7, 1775, a group of ships led by Captain Wallace and the *HMS Rose* sailed into town and demanded provisions. When refused, Wallace shelled the town, causing some damage. The attack was stopped when the town's leaders rowed out to the *Rose* to negotiate a cease-fire, but then a second attack took place on May 25, 1778. This time, 500 British and Hessian troops marched through the main street (Hope Street now RI Route 114)) and burned 30 barracks and houses, taking some prisoners to Newport.

Bristol has the oldest continuously celebrated Independence Day festivities in the United States. The first mention of the celebration comes from July 1777, when a British officer noted sounds coming from across Narragansett Bay, but tradition suggests that the first observance was held on July 4, 1785.

Until 1854, Bristol was one of the five state capitals of Rhode Island.

Bristol is home to Roger Williams University, named for Rhode Island founder Roger Williams.

The southerly terminus of the East Bay Bike Path is located at Independence Park on Bristol Harbor. The Bike path continues north to India Point Park in Providence, Rhode Island. Constructed on a former railroad right of way, some of the best views of Narragansett Bay can be seen along this magnificent corridor. This path is a valued commodity to Bristol; it allows bikers, roller skaters and walkers to enjoy the area.

The Bristol-based Herreshoff Manufacturing Company built five consecutive America's Cup Defenders between 1893 and 1920. The Colt Estate, now known as Colt Park, was home to Samuel P. Colt, founder of the United States Rubber Company and nephew the man of the same name famous for the invention of the revolver. Colt Park lies on magnificently manicured gardens abutting the West Passage of Narragansett Bay, and is popular for its unparalleled views of the waterfront and spectacular sunsets.

Bristol is the site of one National Historic Landmark, the Joseph Reynolds House built in 1700. The Marquis de Lafayette and his staff in 1778 used the building as headquarters during the Battle of Rhode Island.^[7]

Geography

Bristol is situated on 10.1 square miles (26 km²) of a peninsula (the smaller sub-peninsula on the west is called Poppasquash), with Narragansett Bay on its west and Mount Hope Bay on its east.

According to the United States Census Bureau, the town has a total area of 20.6 square miles (53.4 km²), of which, 10.1 square miles (26.2 km²) of it is land and 10.5 square miles (27.2 km²) of it (50.99%) is water. Bristol's harbor is home to over 800 boat moorings.

Demographics

As of the census of 2000, there were 22,469 people, 8,314 households, and 5,653 families residing in the town. The population density was 2,222.2 people per square mile (858.1/km²). There were 8,705 housing units at an average density of 860.9/sq mi (332.4/km²). The ethnic group makeup of the town was 97.14% European, 1.29% Hispanic or Latino (of any race), 0.67% Asian, 0.62% African, 0.16% Native American, 0.04% Pacific Islander, 0.33% other ethnic group, and 1.03% from two or more races.

Points of interest and Registered Historic Places

- America's Cup Hall of Fame
- Blithewold Mansion, Gardens and Arboretum
- Bristol County Courthouse (Rhode Island)
Bristol Historical and Preservation Society
- Bristol Customhouse and Post Office
- Bristol Ferry Lighthouse
- Bristol Waterfront Historic District
- Coggeshall Farm Museum (c. 1790)
- Colt State Park
- Juniper Hill Cemetery
- Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology
- Herreshoff Marine Museum
- Linden Place Mansion, Home of the DeWolfs
- Mount Hope Bridge
- Mount Hope Farm
- Poppasquash Farms Historic District
- Roger Williams University
- Roger Williams University School of Law

Places of Worship

- St. Elizabeth's Church (Roman Catholic)
- Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Roman Catholic)
- St. Mary's Church (Roman Catholic)
- First Congregational Church (UCC)
- St. Michael's Episcopal Church (Episcopal)
- Freedom Road Baptist Church (Baptist)
- First Baptist Church of Bristol (Baptist)
- United Brother's Synagogue (Jewish)