

W3R[®]-US Auto Tour through Rhode Island

Print It -- Read It -- Drive It

Copyright to the W3R[®]-US up through latest change:
2018-09-12 moved to a consistent format

We thank the Rhode Island Department of Transportation for recommending the auto route on the following pages, following or paralleling the historic 1781 land route of the French army.

Disclaimer: Auto touring involves many safety hazards that are beyond the knowledge and control of the authors and publishers of these guides. Thus the use of the information here is at your own risk.

Plan carefully, be alert for problems, and enjoy the scenery, the fresh air, and the history

Brief Overview of the French Military Presence

In July 1780 a 5,000-man French army commanded by General Rochambeau landed in Newport RI to assist the Continental Army under General Washington in freeing the American colonies from British control. In June of 1781 the French army moved north to Providence and then west through Connecticut to join forces with the Continental Army on the Hudson River (near Dobbs Ferry) north of British-controlled New York City.

Moving several thousand men nearly 700 miles is a complicated task that requires considerable experience, planning, and organization. After six years of war the Americans were familiar with the terrain and with the local sources of food and hay for the livestock, but the French were not. Nearly 2,000 horses and oxen accompanied the French army to carry the officers, pull the wagons, and provide meat. Mounted patrols checked and mapped the route and made arrangements to purchase provisions. The French quartermasters paid farmers and merchants with silver coins, which were much preferred to Continental dollars.

The French army traveled in four divisions spaced a day apart and stayed in campsites that had been used by the Continental army throughout the war. To avoid the summer heat the soldiers marched out of camp at 4 AM and completed their daily 14-mile march before noon. Soldiers slept in eight-man tents, and company-grade officers slept in two-man tents, while regimental and general officers lodged in nearby taverns, such as Waterman's Tavern in Coventry RI.

See w3r-archive.org/history/hist-all.htm for details of the historic march in 1781. See w3r-archive.org/history/maps-hist/aa_maps-hist.htm for ten detailed National Park Service maps of the historic network of routes taken by the allied armies in 1781.

Auto Tour of the W3R[®]

In 2006 Many trail markers with the W3R[®] logo were installed by the Rhode Island Department of Transportation. This recommended tourism route does not follow all of those signs.

This tourism route in Rhode Island starts by following the land route from Newport to the march assembly area in Providence. This route was taken by the French baggage wagons and some of the French troops.

1. Go north from Old State House in Newport* to the Mount Hope Bridge

- Start at the Colony House (Old State House) at Bull St. and Broadway) in Newport.
- Take Broadway north 1.2 miles until it merges with Route 114.
- Follow this 12 miles over the Mount Hope Bridge.

2. Go north from the Mount Hope Bridge to East Providence

- Continue on Route 114 through Warren and Barrington to East Providence. After about 12 miles Route 114 ends at Route 6.
- Take a left onto Route 6 and follow it 1.3 miles and merge with I-195 west to go over the bridge.
- Shortly thereafter take the exit to Route 44 north and after 0.4 miles go left on College St. After two blocks this becomes Westminster St. and passes the Post Office.

CONTINUING WEST we follow the route of the two divisions of the French army and their baggage trains as they marched from Providence to Connecticut.

3. Go west through Providence and south to Cranston*

- Take Westminster St. SW 0.4 miles, turn right onto Empire St., after three blocks turn left onto Broadway and follow this 1.4 miles where it ends at Westminster St.
- Continue two blocks and bear left on Route 14 (Plainfield St). After 3.8 miles it passes under I-295. After 4.3 miles more the present-day road curves right, but the old road went straight and downhill. It is submerged under the present reservoir.

4. Go west from Cranston to the border with CT

- Continue on Route 14 across the causeway and around the end of the reservoir for 4.0 miles, where it turns left.
- After 0.7 miles turn left on Route 12 and go 2.3 miles to Old Plainfield Pike (just before the Pottersville Fire Station). Turn right on this road, which is the continuation of the old road after it comes out of the reservoir. This road passes several homes that were here in 1781, including (at 1.7 miles) one of several taverns owned by Mr. Waterman. This is the tavern where General Rochambeau spent the night during his several trips to meet with General Washington in Wethersfield CT.
- Continuing on 2.6 miles Old Plainfield Pike crosses Route 102 and becomes Rt 14.
- After 5.7 miles you cross into CT and the road splits. Take the left branch, which is Route 14A.

ALTERNATIVE TRIP VIA FERRY (non-auto) This roughly follows the water route taken from Newport to Providence in June 1781 by transports carrying many of the French troops.

- Start at Perroti Park in Newport (Washington St. and Long Warf St.) and take the fast passenger ferry (no cars allowed). Plan for a round trip, or have a friend drive your car to Providence to pick you up.
- The ferry docks at the Point St. Landing in Providence --on the west side of the river, south-side of the U.S. Route 1 bridge.
- Go west on U.S. Route 1 one block, go right on Eddy St. 0.6 miles and left on Post Office St. to the Post Office.

Pearls along the Necklace -- Nearby Revolutionary-Era Sites

COVENTRY:

=> Waterman's Tavern, 283 Maple Valley Road, near Whaley's Hollow in Coventry, is a "witness house", present when the French Expeditionary Force passed by, camping in the nearby fields.

=> General Nathanael Greene Homestead, 50 Taft St, Coventry, is a museum focused on this commander, who successfully exhausted the British forces in the southern U.S., causing them to move in 1781 to Yorktown to await relief.

CRANSTON: The Joy Homestead, on Old Scituate Avenue in Cranston was built between 1764 and 1778. It is a "witness house", present when the French Expeditionary Force marched by. You may tour the home. The W3R[®] is celebrated here each June with the Strawberry Buscuit Tea.

NEWPORT has many buildings and markers related to the W3R[®]:

=> Fort Adams State Park, 80 Fort Adams Dr, Newport, has the Continental sloop *Providence*, a reproduction of the 10-gun, 110-foot-tall topsail sloop. This was the first ship commissioned by the Continental Navy and the first command of Captain John Paul Jones.

=> Hunter House, 54 Washington Street, Newport -- near the Goat Island Causeway in Newport -- was built in 1748 and has famous Townsend-Goddard furniture, silver, and portraits of the period. The house served as the land headquarters of French Admiral de Ternay from July 1780 until his death in December 15, 1780. He is buried in the yard of Trinity Church, 141 Spring St, Newport.

=> The Artillery Company of Newport (part of the Rhode Island Militia), 23 Clarke St, Newport, was chartered in 1741. It is the nation's oldest military organization in continuous service under its original charter. The Company's military museum contains a fine collection of historic weaponry.

=> The Wanton-Lyman-Hazard House, 17 Broadway, Newport, is near Washington Square -- where the Newport Stamp Act Riot of 1765 occurred. This home, built in 1675, is the oldest restored house in Newport.

=> The White Horse Tavern, 26 Marlborough St, Newport, was built in 1673. It is the oldest operating tavern in the U.S.

For restaurants and tourism attraction near in Rhode Island visit

<http://www.eatinri.com/rihouse/newport.htm>

DRAFT