

The Tour for Kids and Teens

First Baptist Church in America

Bridget Champlin



Hele and welcome to the First Baptist church in America. Thank you for choosing the first. I know there are a lot of Baptist churches in Rhode Island. Why are you here? Is there anything you know about Roger Williams? Where are you from?

MANNING ROOM:

This room is named in honor of Dr. James Manning, first president of Brown and the pastor of the church when this meetinghouse was built in 1774-1775.

Roger Williams was born in Smithfield, England about 1603, but historians can't know for sure because the church that had his baptismal record burned in the Great Fire of London in 1666. He was the second child of James and Alice Pemberton. Williams's father was a merchant tailor; he sewed things (tailor is someone who makes clothes). [He made clothes and sold cloth as well.]

The education of Williams:

- To Roger education was important. He started by going to a school run by his church.
- Williams learned to read and write. In addition, he learned how to speak Latin.
- He also had some knowledge of French and Dutch. When Williams was fourteen he learned short hand, which led to a job with Sir Edward Coke.
- In 1621 Sir Coke was impressed with Williams and paid for him to go to a private school called The Charter House (all boys).
- As a result of Williams's hard work, he was accepted to **Cambridge University** (in that time one of England finest). As his studies continued, he learned Greek, Hebrew, and advanced his knowledge of Latin.

The life of Roger Williams

- In 1629 Williams was hired by Sir William Masham.
- William's job was to be a private chaplain he wanted to marry a niece of Lady Barrington. Williams was rejected because he was from a lower social group than the niece. (example) It is like a movie star marrying a regular person.

- He ended up marrying Mary Barnard. She was a minister's daughter. [A minister is someone who is authorized to by a church to carry out particular church functions. In a Baptist church, such as this one, the minister is the one who performs baptisms and presides at the serving of the Lord's Supper. In addition, the minister is expected to preach the Sunday sermons and function as a teacher to the congregation.]

Williams in America:

- In 1631 Mary & Roger moved to Boston, Mass. They move from Boston to Salem, then to Plymouth Colony, and then came back to Salem.
- Williams' trouble really started in Salem. He was saying at the time radical things like the idea of church and state should be separate; that the state had no business interfering in church affairs.
- He also criticized Massachusetts for taking the land of the Indians. He was tried and convicted of sedition and heresy and ordered to be banished to England.
- Williams fled Salem in the snow in February 1636, and was given shelter by the Wampanoag Indians. Williams was different from other founders; he made friends with the many Indian tribes. *****Then, in 1636 he crossed the Seekonk River into the territory of the Narragansetts, and he bought what is now Providence. *****
- Williams was on very friendly terms with the Wampanoags and Narragansetts. He tried to keep the peace, and over the course of the next thirty years even gave himself twice to be a hostage to guarantee the safe return of Indian leaders who were having trouble with Massachusetts and Plymouth colonies. He was especially an ally/wingman for the Narragansetts. The surrounding colonies (Massachusetts, Plymouth, Connecticut) did not like that at all; and they tried constantly to destroy both Rhode Island and the Narragansetts.
- Williams was an ex-Anglican priest, ex-Puritan, ex-Separatist. In 1638 he became a Baptist.
- Williams dies in providence in 1683.

*fun fact: The Roger Williams park and zoo. These were named for him in the 1880s. The original part of the park land was the home and farm of Betsey Williams – a woman descended from RW, but 200 years later. A fun fact that is true is that the RW Spring is just up North Main Street as part of the RW National Memorial. His original house was just up the hill from the spring, but after he died, in 50 years the house collapsed into the cellar. He was buried in

his yard, but his grave has never been found since that day. To this day, nobody knows where his body was buried.

*fun fact: Mary and Roger had six kids. [They had 6: Mary, Freeborn, Providence, Mercy, Daniel, and Joseph.]

Show the fire bucket and talk about how they used sand.

Talk about the bar shots and what they were used for. The navy used them to attack the ropes on boats. Also bar shots were used to balance the chandelier after it was installed.

The tiles and how they were from the original parsonage. Talk about the tea pot that was Mary Williams. Take out the Edison light bulb. Talk about the china bowls and how the Chinese thought they were junk. Talk about the cannon balls, kettle and the whale oil lamp sticks.

Please move on the auditorium

Well does anyone know what these are? (the collection boxes) [See if they can guess which ones are original and which ones are reproductions? –the ones with the faded fabric are the original ones.]

Have them guess.

Have them try to read the plac and talk about how the brown had the graduation from 1775 to present.

- The church was founded in 1638.
- During the whole time from 1638 to 1700, the church met in homes or out of doors. A meetinghouse was finally erected in 1700, and second one in 1726, and the present one in 1774-1775. The

first two were up on North Main Street at the corner of Smith and North Main.

- The building you are in today was built in 1775. [This is the 3rd meetinghouse of the church. It's also the largest wooden building surviving from Colonial America.]
- Can you tell me what shape this room looks like? **Answer: square.**
- In the 1700's contractors had no training on how to build they looked at books.
- The style of the church is Georgian architecture named after a king of England. This room was built to seat 1,200 people but at the time the church had 150 members. Now the new fire code limits seating to 790 people.
- These pillars are made out of big oak trees that were donated.
- See this pillar it looks like it is leaning. Why is it leaning? It is an optical illusion caused by the fluting following the curve of the grain of the wood. Another pillar in the southwest corner shows the cracking caused by the tree's drying out and splitting.
- This carving was done all by hand.
- The 185ft steeple was put up in three and a half days. A steeple is a tall part of the church. **It has survived lightning strikes and hurricanes.**
- **In 1790 George Washington was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws by Brown University. He probably visited the meetinghouse while he was here.**
- There was no music in the church until 1770 when Dr. Manning had reintroduced singing. The first musical instrument in the church was a cello in 1804. Then in 1834 the organ was installed. The organ has been rebuilt four times. most recently in 2000
- Until the early 1930's the pews could be bought. This pew (87) belonged to Governor T.F. Green. Yes, the one that the airport is named after. ******And President and Mrs. Carter and their daughter [Amy] at right here. Then secret service sat right there.**

- The owners of the pews could put in foot stools like this. They aren't all the same; it is easy to tell what time period they are from. [If somebody asks you to identify the date for a footstool, could you do it?]
- They also had this box in the pews. Also the pew owners could put in arm rest and drawers for personal items.

- (Go to Hope Brown Ives['] pew) This is called a spit box and the men spit their chewing tobacco juice in it. Have the kids find the pew with the different shelf.
- This pew was Hope Brown Ives. She was a very important person to the church. [Even more important was Nicholas Brown, for whom Brown University was named. His is the front-center-left pew (facing the pulpit).] He's the person who donated the organ.
- In 1792 she gave this chandelier in honor of her father Nicholas Brown. It was imported from Waterford Ireland. The chandelier was lit by candles but was piped for gas in 1854.
- In 1914 the chandelier was converted to electricity.
- If you follow me I will show you the balcony.
- Until the 1790s there were some slaves here. See half way through the organ there was a balcony for people of color-Indians and African-Americans were segregated in that second balcony.
- The church had a huge restoration in 1957.
- John D Rockefeller gave the church money.
- They put in more outlets. They fixed the lighting, and the fire codes. [this is all 2010]
- They also fixed the columns. (point to a column) [1957]
- How about the baptistry?
- What would you say about this? Tourists frequently ask what is done, how it is done, and to whom is it done? You'd need to acquaint yourself with the basic facts about baptism. Baptists practice it by total immersion (completely dipped under water) while Catholics, Lutherans, and others baptize infants by sprinkling. Baptists require believer's baptism, that baptism is a personal decision by someone who knows what he/she is doing, not something performed on an infant who knows nothing about it. Baptism in a Baptist church is done as a public ceremony in front of the whole congregation. You'd probably want to bow out on a question of why it is done differently from other denominations, saying that it is a theological issue that you do not understand.