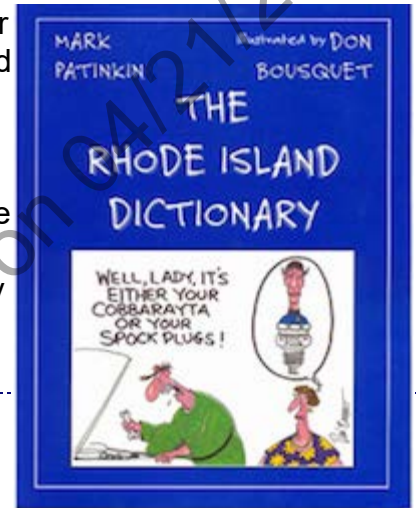


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## Quahog.org Guide to Rhode Island Language Stuff

Whatchoo lookin' at?

It was inevitable that we would have to put one of these pages together eventually. After all, every other webpage that talks about Rhode Island has one. The following is by no means meant to be comprehensive—we're willing to leave that up to the experts. Many of the words and phrases straddle state boundaries, and many of the phonetic pronunciations are true for only a small portion of the population. We've met plenty of native Rhode Islanders who have the classic accent, as well as many who have no discernable accent at all. Your mileage may vary. For a definitive guide to Vo Dyinglish, see the excellent book, [Rhode Island Dictionary](#) by Mark Patinkin and Don Bousquet.



### ACI

The [Adult Correctional Institute](#). It's located in [Cveaanstin](#). People are always either being remanded to it or escaping from it.

### Antnee, Bvenda, Richt, Shevl

Names for children in Rhode Island's Italian-American neighborhoods.

### Beah

An alcoholic beverage.

### Beef Stew

In [New York System](#) parlance, "beef stew" is an order of French fries loaded with salt, vinegar, and ketchup.

### Bubbla

Drinking fountain. The word is apparently also used in parts of the upper Midwest and Australia. We've read in a couple of places that the usage may be related to the Wisconsin-based manufacturer, Kohler, which marketed a fountain under the Bubbler name around 1914.

Reader Sandra says, "When we were in Portland, Oregon, we found that they had public 'bubblers.' The word makes sense as that is what the water is doing."

### Bullrake

A tool for harvesting shellfish. It has a long handle and tines that curl around to form a wide basket.

### Cabinet

A drink made from milk, flavored syrup, and ice cream. In other parts of the country it's called a

milk shake or a frappe. A liberal interpretation of the entry for cabinet in the *Oxford English Dictionary* might suggest that the term originated from the English Newcastle or cabinet pudding, "a pudding made of bread or cake, dried fruit, eggs and milk, usually served hot with a sauce." Or it might not.

### Camavo

A member of the holy muscle car trinity, along with the Firebird and the Iroc. Popular with mullet-headed men who have girlfriends named Shevl and who wear black t-shirts with the sleeves cut off.

### Casino

There are buildings around Rhode Island that are called casinos, yet they contain no games of chance. The word "casino," in this case, comes from the Italian *casina*, or "little summer house."

### Chariho

A district made up of the towns of **Charlestown**, **Richmond**, and **Hopkinton**.

### Cherrystone

Cherrystones are quahogs that are a little larger and juicier than little necks. They are usually served raw on the half shell or cooked with pasta dishes.

### Chourico

Pronounced shuh-reese. A smoked Portuguese sausage that is dense and spicy. There's also **Linguica** (leeng-gwee-sa), which is less spicy, as it's made with less chili pepper.

### Comatta

Depending on your point of view, comatta is either Italian slang for godmother, girlfriend, or mistress, as in "I can bring [Governor Don] Carcieri down. I got stuff. If nothing else, I've got the names of the past comattas. I just gotta throw them out there." These words were spoken by Democratic lobbyist Guy Dufault on his political chat show *The Real Deal*, which aired Sunday, November 6, 2005, on UPN 28.

The following day local news outlets scrambled to figure out how to spell the unfamiliar word. WJAR Channel 10 and WPRI Channel 12 decided on "goumada." The *Providence Phoenix* was considering "cumada" until the *Providence Journal* went on record with "comatta."

So where does "godmother" come in? Reportedly, an Italian man would tell his wife he was going to visit his godmother, or "comare," when in fact he was off to engage in illicit extramarital activities. Somehow, the theory goes, "comare" became "comatta" over time.

However it's spelled, the use of the word cost Dufault pretty much every financial relationship he had, including his TV show. Pretty powerful word, eh?

### Cunnin'

Cute; adorable. "Oh, look at this **Buddy Cianci bobblehead**. How cunnin'!"

### Cveanstin

The municipality south of Providence and north of **Wa'wik**.

### De boatayuz

More than one, less than three.

## De klenzaz

The local dry-cleaning establishment.



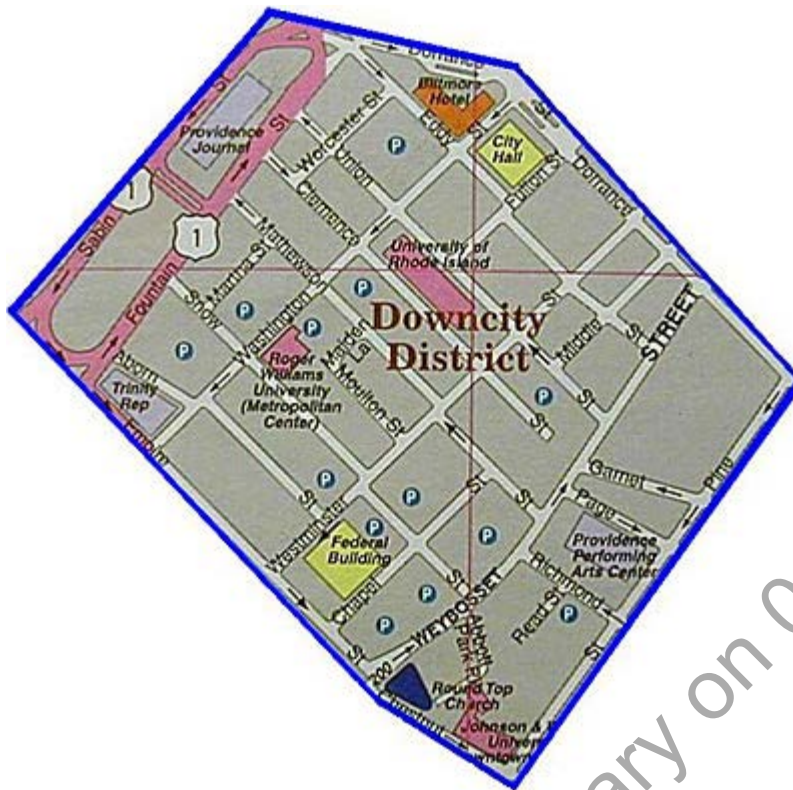
Eagle Cleansers, 411 Charles Street, Providence.

## Downcity

Some people think Downcity is just another name for Providence's downtown, but it actually specifically refers to the Downcity Arts and Entertainment District, established in 1996. The district is bounded by Dorrance, Sabin, Empire, and Pine Streets.

The word (with a small "d") can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century when it actually was a colloquial synonym for downtown Providence. It was resurrected (with a big "d") during a design charrette run by Andres Duany in the early 1990s, when a rebranding of the old commercial district into an arts district was proposed. Beginning in the 1930s, Providence's downtown declined as businesses left and residents moved to the suburbs. The Downcity Arts and Entertainment District was part of a larger scheme to revitalize downtown through preservation, renovation, investment, tax credits, and increased security and access.

Last Viewed by First City Library on 04/21/2020



The Downcity Arts and Entertainment District.

**Downsella**

Where you keep that treadmill that you used for about a week back in '93.

**Draw**

A 'draw' is an open-topped box with handles on the front that slides into dressers, cupboards, file cabinets, etc.

**Eas' (or Wes') Grennich**

Witches may live there, but they're not pronounced.

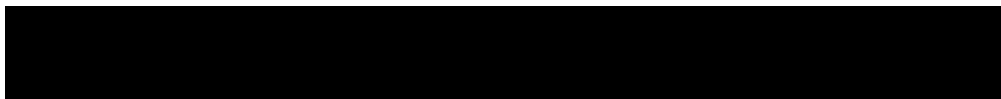
**Elastics**

Otherwise known as rubber bands.

**Fuggeddaboutit!**

Literally "forget about it," this phrase can mean anything from "yes" to "no" and everything in between, depending upon context and inflection. Donnie Brasco (as played by Johnny Depp), in the film by the same name, explains some of the subtleties:

"Forget about it" is like if you agree with someone, you know, like "Raquel Welsh is one great piece of ass, forget about it." But then, if you disagree, like, "A Lincoln is better than a Cadillac? Forget about it!" you know? But then, it's also like if something's the greatest thing in the world, like Mingrio's Peppers, "forget about it." But it's also like saying "Go to hell!" too. Like, you know, like, "Hey Paulie, you got a one inch pecker?" and Paulie says, "Forget about it!" Sometimes it just means forget about it.





### Gagga

Otherwise known as a **destroyer**, **bellybuster**, or **hot wiener**. A small hot dog with a natural casing, slathered in mustard, meat sauce, chopped onions, and celery salt, and served in a steamed bun.

### Glove Box

The storage area that is located in the dashboard on the passenger side of your car. It usually contains anything and everything *but* gloves. Otherwise known as a "glove compartment" in other parts of the country.

### God

v. 1. To protect from harm; watch over. 2. To watch over to prevent escape. 3. To keep watch at (a door or gate). 4. To take precautions: *god against infection*. --n. 1. One that gods. 2. Watchful care: *under close god*. 3. Defensive posture or stance. 4. *Football*. One of the two players on either side of the center. 5. *Basketball*. Either of the two players stationed near the middle of the court. 6. A device that prevents injury, damage, or loss. (*American Heritage Dictionary*, sort of)

### Gravy

In most places, you would get whiplash trying to get a good look at the person you overheard asking for more gravy for their **paster**. In Rhode island they're just asking for more tomato sauce. According to **Bartlett's Dictionary of Americanisms**, it has also been used to denote the filling in a pie.

### Grinda

Otherwise known as a hoagie, po' boy, or sub. It's a **sangwidge**.

### Hot

The thing in your chest that pumps blood and keeps you alive.

### Idear

All those dropped Rs have to go somewhere. They end up tacked onto the ends of words ending in "A," like **idear**, **bananner**, **paster**, and **vaniller**.

### I'm all set

While not a strictly Rhode Island phrase, this declaration that you require no assistance may still get you quizzical looks in some other parts of the country.

## The Iway

The section of Route 195 that extends from the 95/195 intersection in Providence to the end of Washington Bridge in East Providence. It was branded thus in 2005 by Providence advertising, marketing, and public relations firm **Duffy and Shanley** in order to give Rhode Islanders a feeling of "personal connection and ownership" in the project.

## Jeet?

Have you eaten yet? The appropriate response (assuming you haven't eaten) is "No, joo?"

## Jimmies

A liberal sprinkling of these can brighten up a dull, dreary ice cream cone. We hear they're also called **Ants** in the Woonsocket area. Funny thing is, you'd be hard pressed to find "jimmies" in the baking section of a Rhode Island grocery store, where they are invariably called "sprinkles."

In recent years the term "jimmies" has come under scrutiny as possibly having a racist origin. **Snopes** ranks this claim as "probably false."

## Littleneck

A littleneck is the smallest size of quahog that is legal to harvest. They are served raw on the half shell, or baked in a shell with breadcrumbs and spices as clams casino.

## Lore

Don't break it or they'll put you in the **ACI**.

## Natty Lite

This is a term that seems to be something of an inside joke at **AM630 WPRO**, as in, "You sound like you've had one too many Natty Lites." It actually refers to a brand of beer called Natural Lite. It's not local and has nothing to do with Rhode Island.

## NiRoPe

Usually heard as part of the phrase, "NiRoPe Pricing," the word comes from the names of the three Cardi Brothers, **Nick**, **Ron**, and **Pete**, whose **furniture store** commercials are ubiquitous on Southern New England television and radio stations.

## No school Fosta-Glosta

A catchphrase (much like "Whatchootalkin'boutWillis?"), uttered by much-beloved former media personality Salty Brine during winter snow-day reports. Foster and Gloucester are two abutting communities in the northwest of the state that are completely snowbound during months containing an "r." Salty always lumped the two together when making no-school announcements. Salty passed away in 2004, but many Rhode Islanders of a certain age still believe there's a town out there called Fosta-Glosta. A sure way to find out if someone is lying about having spent time in the state (as though one would), is to challenge them with the phrase "No school..." A real Rhode Islander knows the rest.

## No suh!

I believe you are pulling my leg, my friend.

## On Special

On sale.

## Packy

Short for package store, which is what they call liquor stores around here. Decades of boozeless Sundays ended in Rhode Island on June 28, 2004, when Governor Donald Carcieri signed a bill into law allowing cities and towns to issue licenses to liquor stores that want to open on Sundays.

## Please?

This is not a plea for more porridge, but a polite way of saying, "What the hell did you just say?"

## Potty

A celebration.

## PSDS

What you hang earrings from. Think about it.

## P'tuckit

The municipality north of Providence and south of Attleboro.

## Quahog

A kind of ocean clam, or bivalve mollusk, found in the waters of the North Atlantic. They come in two varieties: *Arctica islandica*, the ocean quahog; and *Mercenaria mercenaria*, the bay quahog. They make handy ashtrays.

The common name, poquaûhock, is taken from the languages of the Narragansett and Wampanoag Indians, and it's thought that today's pronunciation can be traced to those origins. The Narragansetts, from the west side of Narragansett Bay, probably pronounced the word "po-kwa-hok." Today's western Rhode Islanders thus pronounce it "kwa-hog." The Wampanoags of the East Bay called it "po-ko-hok," and today, eastern Rhode Islanders likewise say "ko-hog."

The bay quahog was given its scientific name by Swedish taxonomist Carl Linnaeus. Polished quahog shells were used by Native Americans to make **wampum**, which was perceived by Europeans as a form of currency, so Linnaeus dubbed the bivalve with the Latin word for pay or wages.

## Regluh kawfee

Be careful how you order your coffee in Rhode Island, because if you like it black, requesting a "regular coffee" is not the way to go. Such a request will more often than not get you a cup with cream and sugar added.

## Rhode Island handshake

A little extra gratuity for services rendered.

## Sachem

A sachem is a chief or leader of a Native American tribe or confederation, especially those of the **Algonquian** language group, which includes the **Narragansett** and **Gay Head, Mashpee**, and **Seakonke** Wampanoag tribes. The common usage of "chief sachem" to describe the top leader of a tribe is thus redundant. "Grand sachem" might be more appropriate.

## Sangwidge

A meal served between two pieces of bread. Also **Sammich**.

## Saugy

A particular brand of hot dog, made with natural casings, that cuts loose with a distinctive "snap" when bitten into. The **Saugy Company** was founded in Providence in 1869.

## Scrod

No, "scrod" is not the pluperfect subjunctive of "screwed." It's a fillet made from any one of a number of kinds of young whitefish (under 2.5 pounds), including Atlantic cod, haddock, and pollock. Any Rhode Island seafood restaurant that left scrod off its menu would do so at its own peril.

A 1996 *Yankee* blurb had this to say:

The American Heritage Dictionary called it "a young cod or haddock, especially one split and boned for cooking." Most of New England disagrees, saying that a scrod isn't a fish at all, though what a scrod is seems to be all over the map. Boston's Parker House (celebrating its 140th anniversary this year, making it the country's oldest hotel in continuous operation) says the term was invented there (along with Parker House rolls and Boston cream pie). Hotel chefs needed a general word for a featured fish that they could put permanently on printed menus (another Parker House innovation). Most of the authorities we surveyed agreed: Scrod is a "catch of the day," usually referring to cod, halibut, haddock, or pollack. Some went so far as to point out an acronym: SCROD means 'Select Catch Received on the Day' unless the catch was halibut, and an 'H' would be added.

**Wikipedia** further suggests the word may have come from the Dutch *schrod*, meaning "Piece cut off"; the Cornish *scraw*, to split, salt, and lightly dry; from a contraction of "sacred cod"; or as an acronym for "seaman's catch received on deck" or "small cod remaining on dock."

## Side by each

The phrase comes from the French "côté par chacun" and would be translated by most people as "side by side." It is invariably quoted by Rhode Islanders who believe that Woonsocket, the state's northernmost city, is still overwhelmingly populated by French-Canadian millworkers who mangle the English language. It may have been true once, but now, one, two, and three generations removed, most Woonsocket residents are as American as Beaver Cleaver. Other archaic Woonsocketisms include the use of double pronouns, as in, "I'm going to the supermarket, me," and the misplacement of phrases or modifiers, as in, "Throw me down the stairs my bag," or "Drive slow your car."





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### South County

A mythical area that roughly includes Washington and Kent Counties. The name goes back to the Revolutionary War era when sentiment against the British King led rebel sympathizers to come up with an alternative name for Kings County (much as anti-French sentiment led many to call French fries "freedom fries" in recent times). The name was officially changed to Washington County in 1781, but the old appellation of South County still persists.

### Spa

Walk into a spa in Rhode Island expecting a nice relaxing soak in a hot tub and you may be disappointed. Oh, you can find that kind of spa in Little Rhody, but you're almost as likely to have wandered into a kind of independent mom 'n' pop convenience store or soda fountain. The use of the word may relate to the carbonated or "mineral" water that was used in the preparation of many fountain drinks.

### Stuffie

Clam stuffing baked in a clam shell. Also known as a **stuffed clam**.

David Steinbrick, a producer at Cox Communications, sent us this tidbit: "Over the years, I have heard the best way to describe a 'stuffie' to an outsider. A stuffie is 'a clam meatloaf in an ashtray. Succinct and to the point. Except the non-native may wonder why we cook food in ashtrays." The phrase actually originates from a spoken gag told by folk artist **Jon Campbell** during live performances of his song "One Clam Cake." He uses the phrase to demonstrate how one might explain stuffies to someone from South Dakota.

### Swamp Yankee or Swampuh

A term, specific to eastern Connecticut and South County Rhode Island, used to describe an umpteenth-generation farm-bred denizen of that area who is fiercely independent, stubborn, obstinate, and either ignorant or wily (depending on the prejudices of the source). One origin of the name is said to go back to 1776 when almost the entire town of Thompson, Connecticut, hid out in a swamp for several weeks to escape a British raid that never came. These days the term

is generally less derisive.

## Tags

License plates. Low numbers are highly prized in Rhode Island, with some tags being passed down from generation to generation. In 2003 a state-sanctioned lottery was held to fairly distribute a few available low numbers. Thousands submitted postcards, and only a handful walked away with their own local status symbol.

## A Time

A political fundraiser, as in, "More than 150 friends of John M. Cicilline threw a 'time' for him last week to help him raise money for family expenses as he heads to prison this fall."—*Providence Journal*, August 5, 2008.

## Wandi

Wandi are a flaky, deep-fried Italian pastry, sprinkled with powdered sugar. According to Linda Beaulieu in her **Providence and Rhode Island Cookbook**, the name comes from the way in which the dough wriggles in the hot oil, looking like the waving fingers of a glove, or *guanti*, which in a Neapolitan accent sounds like "wandi."

## Wa'wik

The municipality south of **Cvaanstin** and north of **Eas' Grennich**. Also pronounced **Warrik**.

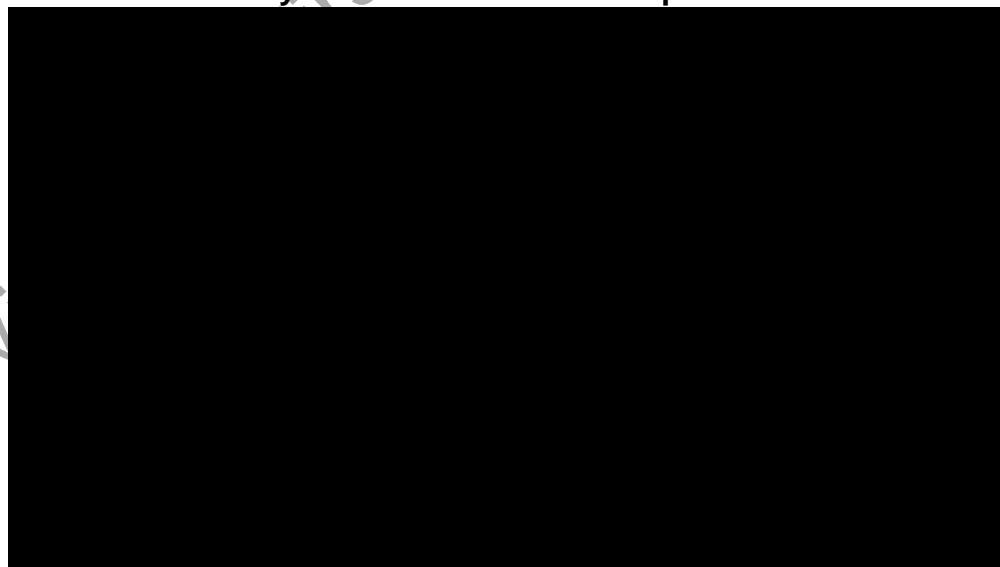
## Wikkit

An intensifier that's interchangeable with "very," as in, "We was drivin' wikkit fast." Also used to mean "extremely good" or "spectacular," as in, "Them forttajuly fyahworks was wikkit!"

## Yo-git

A fermented dairy product, sometimes flavored with fruit.

**Mr. Rhody of ocean State Follies spells it all out:**



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Quahog.org: We put the "gorg" in "gorgonian."

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