

Prospect Terrace Park: A Perfect Spot to Survey Providence

Prospect Terrace Park is the ideal place to kick off a visit to Providence, or just enjoy a sandwich and city view if you are a local. Tucked away along Congdon Street on Providence's historic East Side, Prospect Terrace is near a number of other attractions including Benefit Street, Brown University, RISD, the Providence Athenaeum and the John Brown House Museum. The impressive College Hill neighborhood surrounding Prospect Terrace Park is ideal for strolling, and features a number of elegant 18th and 19th century houses.

"It's nice to have a lookout of the city be a park rather than a building," noted visitor Annie Meere as she gazed out over Providence on a cloudy Saturday afternoon. The park is atypical of Rhode Island in that you actually feel like you're above sea level, "It has a San Francisco feeling because of the elevation," added Meere.

Prospect Terrace has a number of trees surrounding it to complement the view, and in fall is one of the best city spots to take in the changing colors. Another great time to visit, oddly perhaps for a lookout, is when it's foggy out. It is then that the park and its several centuries old surroundings feel positively gothic. Our era of malls, interstates and cell phones recedes, and it is easy to imagine a horse drawn carriage arriving at the park's entrance and a cloaked figure alighting. Not surprisingly, Prospect Terrace, which was established in 1867, was a favored haunt of famed Providence horror and supernatural writer H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937). Lovecraft lived nearby and a famous story of his, "The Shunned House," is about scary goings-on at place on Benefit Street, a quarter mile away.

As one stands at the park's railing, which protects sightseers from a steep drop, the view is to the west. The Meeting House of the First Baptist Church, City Hall, the State House, Providence Place Mall and Providence's modest collection of downtown skyscrapers are all clearly visible. The scene captures the many facets of Providence: its beginning as a religious colony, its establishment as a political capital, and its rise in the 19th century as a center for industry and commerce.

The park not only has a fine view, it is home to the founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams, who is buried there. There is a 35-foot stone statue of Williams in whose base the remains of the man himself lie, having been moved there when the memorial to him was constructed in the late 1930s. The statue, the work of sculptor Leo Friedlander, is actually somewhat difficult to see from the park as Williams is looking outward from a promontory. The monument's original design, which was never completed, included a staircase from the street below which would have allowed one to see Williams head on. You can, however, glimpse the crusader for religious freedom in profile while standing at the park's railing.

Prospect Terrace is a city park and is open dawn to dusk. It's popular with visitors, local dog walkers, and Brown University students. The principal attraction is definitely the view; aside from some benches and the aforementioned statue, there isn't much else, not that a spot with such an elegant vista requires it.

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