

**President Christina Paxson
Eruv Dedication
Brown RISD Hillel
Providence, RI
Tuesday, April 4, 2017 @ 12:30 p.m.**

Good afternoon. I am very pleased to be here as we recognize the expansion of the Providence Eruv to include College Hill, home to Brown University and the Rhode Island School of Design.

I want to first add my thanks to everyone involved in making this happen – including Mayor Elorza, Dr. Marc Diamond, Joseph Hollander, Marshall Einhorn, Rabbi Yurdkowsky, Sam Zurier, the utility companies, and many others. It is often the detail work that enables civil society to flourish. And negotiating an Eruv in the heart of a major city is about the details.

Now, as all of us here know, many things in Rhode Island are linked to the towering legacy of Roger Williams. And so it should come as no surprise that the Providence Eruv also shares a connection to Rhode Island's founding father – one that is both physical and spiritual.

The physical western border of the Eruv is the Providence River, which runs alongside and includes the Roger Williams National Memorial Park and Education Center on North Main Street. The Center, of course, celebrates Williams' many contributions to the principle of freedom.

One of his contributions was the radical-at-the-time view of religion as a matter of individual conscience that should remain separate from government. In founding the Providence Plantations as a sanctuary for religious dissidents such as Baptists, Quakers, and Jews, Williams was, in many ways, the first to promote community-based diversity and tolerance. And so spiritually, the Eruv's connection to Roger Williams is about conscience of place.

"God is too large to be housed under one roof," Williams once wrote.

Centuries before Williams' time, Jewish sages crafted the idea of a symbolic border that would fuse together private spaces into a larger shared space. In doing so, they created a pathway for Jews to adapt the places where they live to accommodate 'carrying' related to the Sabbath. The Eruv was, in this view, an advancement that reconciled Jewish law with the more practical considerations of religious observance.

So today, with the expansion of the Providence eruv, we make accommodation for members of the Brown and RISD Jewish communities to 'carry' on the Sabbath, in this place. We recognize the arc of Rhode Island's early rise as a bastion of religious liberty. And we affirm College Hill as a crossroads of many faiths, a place where the Eruv may also encompass calls to Muslim prayer, the peal of Christian church bells, or Buddhist chanting.

As Roger Williams insisted, “The civil state is humbly to be implored to provide in their high wisdom for the security of all the respective consciences, in their respective meetings, assemblings, worshipings, preachings, disputings ...and that civil peace and the beauty of civility and humanity be maintained among the chief opposers and dissenters.”

Put another way, God’s presence is reflected across the public good, in many beautiful and meaningful ways.

Thank you.