

Baseline Survey Census Research

Centre County

The Federal population census is an important tool for understanding the history of a community and how that community has changed over time. The census provides data that can help us to better understand Pennsylvania's diverse racial and ethnic populations (referred to as underrepresented communities for purposes of this Baseline Survey effort), where these populations settled historically, and how they left their mark on the Commonwealth's landscape.

Pennsylvania has a history of being ethnically diverse in both the urban areas of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh and in the commonwealth's smaller cities and rural areas. Native Americans have called Pennsylvania's lands home for centuries. Dutch, Swedish, and Finnish settlers moved to Pennsylvania in the late 17th century, and were quickly followed by English, German and other Europeans by the turn of the 18th century. Both enslaved and free Africans and African Americans lived in Pennsylvania as early as 1690 and the commonwealth's Black communities grew exponentially with the First Great Migration in the early 20th century. By the mid-20th century, people from almost all racial and ethnic groups had settled in Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania's historical racial and ethnic diversity and the surviving older and historic places that embody that diversity is not well understood or well documented. By understanding what populations were present, when, and where they lived, the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office (PA SHPO) can identify and document the older and historic places associated with these underrepresented communities through targeted survey work.

Once this information is collected and added to PA-SHARE, Pennsylvania's online database of older and historic places, this important information will be available to professionals and the public alike, providing everyone with data to support the need to tell broader and more inclusive stories.

It is important to note that census data is only one part of the extensive research that is necessary to understand Pennsylvania's varied and changing communities over the last four hundred years. The information collected, methods for collecting it, and categories and definitions changed from census taker to census taker and from year to year.

Centre County is one of the fifty-two counties in Pennsylvania where PA SHPO and its contractors will be working over the next three years to collect information about historic places that are underrepresented in Pennsylvania's statewide historic inventory.

It is important that PA SHPO collects information about the older and historic places that Pennsylvanian's value in their communities. PA SHPO welcomes public recommendations for places that should be documented in this survey. If you would like to provide your feedback, please fill out this [short survey form](#).



Historic Postcard of a Centre County Quaker Meeting House

Learn More:

[Historic Resources Survey in Pennsylvania](#)
[PA SHPO's Baseline Survey Project](#)
[PA-SHARE](#)

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Centre County was created on February 13, 1800 and is the fifth largest county by area in the state. There are 36 municipalities in Centre County. As of the 2010 federal census, the population was 153,990. The total population of Centre County has steadily risen each decade since its formation. Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) of Centre County have not followed the same growth pattern as the population as a whole. Notable peaks in BIPOC residents occurred in 1860, 1890, and 1960.

The first federal population census occurred in Centre County in 1820. The total population of the county at the time was 13,796, made up of 13,676 White and 120 Black residents, none of whom were enslaved. Over time, the majority of BIPOC in Centre County have identified as Black. The 1860 census documented people of mixed Black and White heritage (Mulatto, Other in the table below) and noted 98 residents of mixed heritage in Centre County – around 37% of the total BIPOC population. Future censuses did not document mixed-race people.

Native Americans and Asians were both documented in 1890, 1920, and 1960 only, though in other years these groups may have been categorized as non-Black colored people. Notably in 1960, the Asian community in Centre County, then made up of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino people, rose to 119 individuals.

	White	Black	Native American	Asian	Hispanic	Other
1790	0	0	0	0	0	0
1800	0	0	0	0	0	0
1810	0	0	0	0	0	0
1820	13676	120	0	0	0	0
1830	0	0	0	0	0	0
1840	20191	301	0	0	0	0
1850	23112	243	0	0	0	0
1860	26739	163	0	0	0	98
1870	34422	266	0	0	0	0
1880	37574	348	0	0	0	0
1890	42708	466	2	3	0	0
1900	42511	382	0	0	0	0
1910	43158	265	0	0	0	1
1920	43910	369	1	4	0	0
1930	45870	420	0	0	0	4
1940	52210	398	0	0	0	0
1950	65449	425	0	0	0	48
1960	77790	611	6	119	0	72

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This graph shows the relationship between total BIPOC populations (left side axis) and total population (right side axis) in Centre County from 1790 to 1960. Significant events that have a bearing on the population are included below the graph to show Centre County's total populations at these important points in time.

No data is available prior to 1820 because the 1800 census combined counts from Centre County with Mifflin County and the 1810 census has not been digitized. The 1830 census counted a total of 18,879 free people, but failed to divide this category by race, resulting in what looks like a BIPOC population of zero.

