

Baseline Survey Census Research Lehigh 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.

Lehigh County is one of the fifty-two counties in Pennsylvania where PA SHPO and its contractors will be working over the next two 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 Lehigh Bridge, Allentown, Lehigh County

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Lehigh County

Lehigh County was formally established on March 6, 1812. It has 25 municipalities and as of the 2020 federal census, the total population was 374,557. The population of Lehigh County was first recorded in the 1820 US Census. A total of 19,295 inhabitants were recorded, 19,246 of whom were White and 49 of whom were free, non-white persons. In 1820, there were no enslaved people in Lehigh County. The total population of Lehigh County grew consistently from 1820 to 1980.

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) population of Lehigh County have historically represented less than 1% of the total population from 1820 to 1960. A larger share of the population was BIPOC in 1970 and 1980. The BIPOC population in Lehigh County has been predominantly Black. The Black population was at its largest in 1980 at 4,121 individuals.

Asians were documented as living in Lehigh County beginning in 1880 and were predominantly of Chinese descent until 1930. In 1930, there were 13 Japanese residents and 12 Chinese residents. Native Americans were recorded in Lehigh County in the 1930, 1950, 1960, and 1980 censuses. 6,924 people of Hispanic descent were recorded in Lehigh County in the 1980 census. In the 1980 census, the number of Hispanic people were the most numerous BIPOC group in Lehigh County. The “Other” category has been used to describe different groups through time. In 1790 and 1800, “Other” specifically noted BIPOC people, predominantly Black Americans, who were not enslaved. In later decades, it is inconclusive whether “Other” includes only mixed-race people or people of Black, Native American, Asian, or Hispanic descent during any given decade.

	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	19246	0	0	0	0	49
1830	0	2	0	0	0	0
1840	25754	33	0	0	0	0
1850	32431	48	0	0	0	0
1860	43696	57	0	0	0	0
1870	56756	40	0	0	0	0
1880	65851	117	0	1	0	0
1890	76524	105	0	2	0	0
1900	93713	173	0	7	0	0
1910	118575	247	0	0	0	10
1920	147783	300	0	18	0	0
1930	172406	460	1	25	0	1
1940	177053	471	0	0	0	9
1950	197536	622	13	32	0	4
1960	226412	957	16	107	0	44
1970	252437	2278	0	0	0	589
1980	263815	4121	205	1706	6924	0

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This graph shows the relationship between BIPOC populations (right side axis) and total population (left side axis) in Lehigh County from 1790 to 1980. Significant events that had a bearing on the population are included below the graph to show Lehigh County's total populations at these important points in time.

The 1830 census only provided the total population, total number of free persons, and total number of enslaved persons. There were two enslaved people in Lehigh County in 1830 and no distinction of race among free people, therefore the BIPOC total for 1830 based on what is known is 2 people.

