

Baseline Survey Census Research

Luzerne 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.

Luzerne 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 a coal mining facility in Luzerne County

Learn More:

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

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Luzerne County was founded on September 25, 1786. It is comprised of 76 municipalities and as of the 2010 federal census, the total population was 320,918. The population of Luzerne County was first recorded during the first United States census in 1790. A total of 4,904 inhabitants were recorded, 11 of whom were enslaved Black people and 13 of whom were “Other Free Persons” of non-White race. From 1790 to 1800, the total population nearly tripled, increasing to 12,839 residents. The total population of Luzerne County steadily increased from 1790 to 1940, achieving a six-digit population total in 1870 of 160,906. Between 1940 and 1960, the population began a downward trend.

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) population of Luzerne County have historically represented less than 1% of the total population from 1790 to 1960. The total population of BIPOC in Luzerne County has generally increased and decreased in proportion with the total population. The BIPOC population in Luzerne County from 1790 to 1960 were predominantly Black. The Black population was at its largest in 1910, with 1182 individuals.

Asians were documented as living in Luzerne County starting in 1880 and were predominantly of Chinese descent until 1930. In 1930, the number of Japanese and Chinese residents were the same, and from 1930 onward, Japanese was the dominant Asian ethnicity in Luzerne County. Native Americans were recorded in Luzerne County in the 1890, 1920, 1930, 1950, and 1960 censuses. Fifty-two people of Hispanic descent, then categorized as Mexican in the census reports, were recorded in the 1930 census. 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	4880	11	0	0	0	13
1800	12743	18	0	0	0	78
1810	0	0	0	0	0	0
1820	19914	113	0	0	0	0
1830	0	0	0	0	0	0
1840	43810	196	0	0	0	0
1850	55699	373	0	0	0	0
1860	89794	450	0	0	0	0
1870	160140	766	0	0	0	0
1880	152310	754	0	1	0	0
1890	200370	816	4	13	0	0
1900	256155	945	0	21	0	0
1910	342240	1182	0	22	0	0
1920	390156	815	1	18	0	1
1930	377975	1056	1	20	52	0
1940	440554	953	0	0	0	9
1950	391268	929	22	13	0	9
1960	345787	1081	7	91	0	36

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

The 1810 federal census is not digitized and therefore there is no population data. The 1830 census only provided the total population, total number of free persons, and total number of enslaved persons. There were no enslaved people in Luzerne County in 1830 and no distinction of race among free people, therefore there are no BIPOC totals for that decade.

