

Baseline Survey Census Research

Northumberland 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.

Northumberland 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 Milton Manufacturing Company, Northumberland County

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

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Northumberland County was created on March 21, 1772. Prior to colonization, the area was the territory of the Akhrakouaeronon, a subtribe of the Susquehannock tribe. Northumberland County was once sprawling, and portions of its lands were used in the formation of 20 different Pennsylvania counties. It achieved its current borders in 1813. There are 36 municipalities in Northumberland County. As of the 2010 federal census, the population was 94,528. After the first federal population census in the county in 1790, the population of Northumberland was 16,963. Northumberland County has experienced exponential growth through most of its history, peaking at 128,504 individuals in 1930. From 1930 onward, the population of Northumberland County has been slowly yet steadily decreasing.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) of Northumberland County have followed a similar growth pattern as the wider population, starting with many BIPOC individuals in the earliest census likely due to Northumberland's large size at the time. The majority of BIPOC in Northumberland County identify as Black. Generally, the BIPOC population decreased through the mid-19th century likely as a result of Northumberland County's area changing, followed by a period of increase, peaking between 1890 and 1920. Post-1920, the BIPOC population entered a period of decline.

Native Americans and Asians were not documented in the Northumberland County census counts until 1890. No people of Hispanic descent were documented in Northumberland County between 1790 and 1960.

	White	Black	Native American	Asian	Hispanic	Other
1790	16,963	89	0	0	0	109
1800	6,648	29	0	0	0	135
1810	0	0	0	0	0	0
1820	15,308	116	0	0	0	0
1830	0	0	0	0	0	0
1840	19,922	105	0	0	0	0
1850	23,180	92	0	0	0	0
1860	28,807	115	0	0	0	0
1870	41,311	133	0	0	0	0
1880	52,929	194	0	0	0	0
1890	74,394	291	1	12	0	0
1900	90,658	240	0	13	0	0
1910	111,171	237	0	12	0	0
1920	121,778	291	0	0	0	10
1930	128,293	201	0	9	0	1
1940	126,733	146	0	0	0	8
1950	116,940	152	0	0	0	23
1960	103,926	143	15	40	0	14

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

No data is available in 1810 because no digitized census records exist for that decade. The 1830 census counted a total of 18,133 free people, but failed to divide this category by race, resulting in what looks like a BIPOC population of zero.

