

# Baseline Survey Census Research

## Perry 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.

Perry 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 an oil plant in Perry County

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

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Perry County was founded on March 22, 1820. It is comprised of 32 municipalities and as of the 2010 federal census, the population was 45,969. The first recorded federal population census in Perry County occurred in 1820. A total of 11,633 inhabitants were recorded, 126 of whom were Black. The total population of Perry County grew until 1880 when it peaked at 28,022 residents. After 1880 the population began to decline reaching an all-time low of 21,744 in 1930 before increasing again into the mid-20th century.

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) population of Perry County remained at 1% or less between 1820 and 1960. BIPOC in Perry County are predominantly Black. The Black population of Perry County was at its peak in 1880 with 164 residents.

Native Americans were living in Perry County and documented in the 1930 and 1960 censuses. No people of Hispanic or Asian descent were recorded on the federal census in Perry County from 1820 to 1960. The “Other” category has been used to describe different status groups through time. In 1790 and 1800, “Other” specifically noted BIPOC people 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
<b>1790</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>1800</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>1810</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>1820</b>	11507	126	0	0	0	0
<b>1830</b>	0	4	0	0	0	0
<b>1840</b>	16882	154	0	0	0	0
<b>1850</b>	19953	135	0	0	0	0
<b>1860</b>	22674	119	0	0	0	0
<b>1870</b>	25307	140	0	0	0	0
<b>1880</b>	27858	164	0	0	0	0
<b>1890</b>	26139	137	0	0	0	0
<b>1900</b>	26181	82	0	0	0	0
<b>1910</b>	24063	73	0	0	0	0
<b>1920</b>	22795	80	0	0	0	0
<b>1930</b>	21693	49	2	0	0	0
<b>1940</b>	23182	29	0	0	0	2
<b>1950</b>	24761	17	0	0	0	4
<b>1960</b>	26575	4	3	0	0	0

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

There is no data prior to 1820 as Perry County was not yet established. The 1830 census only provided the total population, total number of free persons, and total number of enslaved persons. There were 4 enslaved people in Perry County in 1830 and no distinction of race among free people, therefore the BIPOC total for that decade only reflects those people who were enslaved.

