

# Baseline Survey Census Research

## Somerset 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.

Somerset 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 barn in Myersdale, Somerset County

### Learn More:

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

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Somerset County was established on April 17, 1795. There are 50 municipalities in the county and as of the 2020 federal census, the total population was 74,129. The population of Somerset County was first recorded in the 1800 US Census. A total of 10,188 inhabitants were recorded, 10,163 of whom were White and 25 of whom were enslaved Black people. The total population of Somerset County continued a period of steady upward growth from 1820 to 1920, peaking in 1920 at 82,112 total residents. From 1920 to 1970, the total population of Somerset County experienced steady decline, reaching its lowest at 76,037 total residents in 1970.

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) population of Somerset County have historically represented less than 1% of the total population of Somerset County from 1800 to 1970. The BIPOC population in Somerset County has been predominantly Black through 1970. The Black population was at its largest in 1920 at 549 individuals. The total BIPOC population of Somerset County was also highest in 1920 at 554 individuals.

Asians were documented as living in Somerset County as early as 1900 and were predominantly of Chinese descent until 1960. In 1960, the number of Japanese people (3) exceeded the number of Chinese (2). One Filipino person was also first recorded as living in Somerset County in 1960. Native Americans were recorded in Somerset County in 1890, 1900, 1920, and 1960. There were 20 people of Hispanic descent, classified as “Mexicans,” that were recorded only in the 1930 census. The “Other” category has been used to describe different groups through time. Prior to emancipation, “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
<b>1790</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>1800</b>	10163	25	0	0	0	0
<b>1810</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>1820</b>	14160	86	0	0	0	0
<b>1830</b>	0	2	0	0	0	0
<b>1840</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>1850</b>	24317	99	0	0	0	0
<b>1860</b>	26731	47	0	0	0	0
<b>1870</b>	28181	45	0	0	0	0
<b>1880</b>	32994	116	0	0	0	0
<b>1890</b>	37174	142	1	0	0	0
<b>1900</b>	49257	198	4	2	0	0
<b>1910</b>	67466	246	0	0	0	5
<b>1920</b>	81558	549	1	4	0	0
<b>1930</b>	80497	245	0	1	20	1
<b>1940</b>	84789	167	0	0	0	1
<b>1950</b>	81658	148	0	0	0	7
<b>1960</b>	77302	132	3	6	0	7
<b>1970</b>	75809	0	0	0	0	228



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This graph shows the relationship between BIPOC populations (right side axis) and total population (left side axis) in Somerset County from 1790 to 1970. Significant events that had a bearing on the population are included below the graph to show Somerset County's total populations at these important points in time.

The 1810 census is not digitized and therefore no data was available. 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 Somerset County in 1830 and no distinction of race among free people, therefore the BIPOC total for 1830, based on what is known, is two.

