

Baseline Survey Census Research

Fayette 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.

Fayette 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 Photograph of the Belle Vernon Race Course, Fayette County

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Fayette County was founded on September 26, 1783. It has 43 municipalities and as of the 2020 federal census, the total population was 128,804. The population of Fayette County was first recorded in the earliest United States census in 1790. A total of 13,425 inhabitants were recorded, 282 of whom were enslaved Black people and 48 of whom were “Other Free Persons” of non-White race. Total population growth in Fayette County was gradually increasing through most of the 19th century and entered a period of exponential growth from the late 19th into the early 20th century. The total population peaked in 1940 with 200,999 residents before entering a period of slow decline into the 20th century.

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) population of Fayette County have historically represented between 2% and 4% of the total population from 1790 to 1890. From 1900 to 1980, BIPOC residents of Fayette County represented between 3% and 5% of the total population. The total population of BIPOC in Fayette County has generally increased and decreased in proportion with the total population. The BIPOC population in Fayette County from 1790 to 1980 were predominantly Black. The Black population was at its largest in 1930, with 10,586 individuals.

Asians were documented as living in Fayette County beginning in 1870 and were predominantly of Chinese descent until 1960. In 1960, the number of Japanese residents (47) surpassed the number of Chinese residents (38). The 1980 census had the same number of Chinese and Philippino people (74). Native Americans were recorded in Fayette County in the 1880, 1930, 1940, 1960, and 1980 censuses. Eight 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	13095	282	0	0	0	48
1800	17332	76	0	0	0	301
1810	0	0	0	0	0	0
1820	20597	661	0	0	0	0
1830	0	99	0	0	0	0
1840	32109	1461	0	0	0	0
1850	37443	1669	0	0	0	0
1860	38360	1549	0	0	0	0
1870	40532	1200	0	1	0	0
1880	56952	1880	1	0	0	0
1890	77295	2709	0	2	0	0
1900	105442	4952	0	18	0	0
1910	161562	5852	0	35	0	0
1920	181794	6280	0	30	0	30
1930	187907	10586	13	17	8	0
1940	190935	10043	11	6	0	21
1950	180732	0	0	0	0	9167
1960	161139	8055	44	88	0	14
1970	152790	6638	0	0	0	158
1980	153093	5844	144	296	0	0

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This graph shows the relationship between BIPOC populations (right side axis) and total population (left side axis) in Fayette County from 1790 to 1980. Significant events that had a bearing on the population are included below the graph to show Fayette 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 99 enslaved people in Fayette County in 1830 and no distinction of race among free people, therefore the BIPOC total for 1830 based on what is known is 99 persons. The 1950 census only distinguished between white and non-white residents.

