

Baseline Survey Census Research Washington 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.

Washington 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 Washington Roller Rink in Washington

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Washington County

Washington County was founded on March 28, 1781. It is comprised of 34 municipalities and as of the 2020 federal census, the total population was 209,349. The population of Washington County was first recorded during the first federal census in 1790. In 1790, 23,866 people lived in Washington County, 263 of whom were enslaved Black people and 12 of whom were “Other Free Persons” of non-White race. Total population growth in Washington County remained static through the 19th century, entering a period of exponential growth from 1880 to 1930. The population of Washington County was at its largest in 1960 at 217,271 individuals.

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) population of Washington County have historically represented anywhere between 1% and 5% of the total population from 1790 to 1980. The total population of BIPOC in Washington County has grown proportionally with the total population. The BIPOC population in Washington County from 1790 to 1980 were predominantly Black. The Black population was at its largest in 1930, with 10,933 individuals.

Asians were documented as living in Washington County as early as 1890 and were predominantly of Chinese descent until 1980. By 1980, large populations of Korean (115) and South Asian (107) people were living in Washington County, along with Asians of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Vietnamese descent. Native Americans were recorded in Washington County in the 1880, 1890, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1960, and 1980 censuses. People of Hispanic descent were recorded as living in Washington County only in the 1930 census. The “Other” category has been used to describe different groups through time. In 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	23591	263	0	0	0	12
1800	24476	64	0	0	0	294
1810	0	0	0	0	0	0
1820	39251	735	0	0	0	0
1830	0	1	0	0	0	0
1840	40199	897	0	0	0	0
1850	43380	1559	0	0	0	0
1860	45079	1726	0	0	0	0
1870	44772	1968	0	0	0	0
1880	52774	2636	8	0	0	0
1890	67785	3361	3	6	0	0
1900	87793	4366	0	22	0	0
1910	137767	5888	1	24	0	0
1920	181542	7428	1	21	0	0
1930	193702	10933	19	19	128	0
1940	20106	9775	0	0	0	15
1950	200893	8712	0	0	0	23
1960	208060	9137	7	58	0	12
1970	209011	7687	0	0	0	203
1980	208957	7324	270	314	0	74



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This graph shows the relationship between BIPOC populations (right side axis) and total population (left side axis) in Washington County from 1790 to 1980. Significant events that had a bearing on the population are included below the graph to show Washington 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 was one enslaved person in Washington County in 1830 and no distinction of race among free people, therefore the BIPOC total for 1830 based on what is known is 1 person. The 1950 census only distinguished between white and non-white residents.

