

Baseline Survey Census Research

McKean 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.

McKean 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 IOOF Building, Bradford, McKean County

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

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McKean County was founded on September 1, 1826. It contains 22 municipalities and as of the 2020 federal census, the total population was 43,450. The population of McKean County was first recorded in the 1830 US Census. A total of 1,439 inhabitants were recorded. In 1830, population counts by race were not recorded but the 1830 census does reveal that in 1830 there were no enslaved people in McKean County. Total population growth in McKean County dramatically increased between 1870 and 1880 due to the discovery of oil in Bradford in 1875. From 1880 to 1970, the total population remained between 40,000 and 60,000. The total population peaked in 1940 with 56,673 residents.

The Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) population of McKean County have historically represented less than 1% of the total population from 1800 to 1970. The total population of BIPOC in McKean County greatly increased with the onset of the oil boom in the late 19th century. The BIPOC population in McKean County from 1790 to 1970 were predominantly Black. The Black population was at its largest in 1880, with 328 individuals. From 1880 to 1970, the number of Black residents in McKean County gradually lessened over time, bottoming out at 53 individuals in 1970.

Asians were documented as living in McKean County beginning in 1880 and were predominantly of Chinese descent until 1960. In 1960, the number of Japanese residents (3) and Filipino residents (3) surpassed the number of Chinese residents (2). Native Americans were recorded in McKean County in the 1880, 1890, 1910-1940, and 1960-1970 censuses. No people of Hispanic descent were recorded in McKean County from 1800 to 1970. 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	0	0	0	0	0	0
1800	0	0	0	0	0	0
1810	0	0	0	0	0	0
1820	0	0	0	0	0	0
1830	0	0	0	0	0	0
1840	2970	5	0	0	0	0
1850	5218	36	0	0	0	0
1860	8859	0	0	0	0	0
1870	8801	24	0	0	0	0
1880	42211	328	2	26	0	0
1890	46507	299	44	13	0	0
1900	51025	302	0	16	0	0
1910	47609	251	1	7	0	0
1920	48613	313	5	3	0	0
1930	54931	217	17	2	0	0
1940	56465	191	14	2	0	1
1950	56508	99	0	0	0	0
1960	54410	75	14	8	0	10
1970	51748	53	50	27	0	37

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This graph shows the relationship between BIPOC populations (right side axis) and total population (left side axis) in McKean County from 1790 to 1970. Significant events that had a bearing on the population are included below the graph to show McKean 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 no enslaved people in McKean County in 1830 and no distinction of race among free people, therefore the BIPOC total for 1830 based on what is known is 0 people.

