

Early Lancaster County and African Americans

The First United States Census in 1790 recorded 347 slaves in the county of Lancaster and 16 free persons of color. The number of slaves steadily declined, except for an odd bump in 1830, until 1840 when the census recorded only 2 slaves and 3003 free persons of color.

Year	Slave Population	Free Black Population
1790	347	16
1800	178	786
1810	44	1557
1820	21	2206
1830	55	2490
1840	2	3003
1850	0	3614

Resources

African American genealogical research in Lancaster County uses many of the same resources as any other genealogical research and has many of the same difficulties. The largest difficulty is finding the records you need. Below is a brief guide, a more detailed explanation is available in a separate handout entitled, ***Lancaster County Genealogical Resources: Where to find them and why you sometimes can't!*** which appears on the Lancaster Public Library website (www.lancaster.lib.pa.us)

Birth, Death and In Between:

- Lancaster County maintained *birth records* from around 1881 until 1907 and they are housed at the Register of Wills.

Death records were kept from 1894 to 1907 and are housed in the County Archives.

After 1907, birth and death records are kept by the Pennsylvania Department of Vital Records.

Before 1881 and 1894, births and deaths are recorded in church records of baptism and burial.

- *Marriage records* can be found in churches, city archives, and county courthouses depending on where the individuals lived and how settled the area was at the time. Lancaster County officially began recording marriages in 1885.
- Deeds And Property Tax Records have been recorded at the Lancaster County Courthouse since 1729. Earlier records are available in Chester County.
- Wills and Probate Records have been kept at the Lancaster County Courthouse since 1730. Earlier records are available in Chester County.
- Military Records are housed in two places. The records for the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, and the Spanish American War are housed at the National Archives. Indexes and microfilm copies are often available in state archives and are online at sites such as Heritage Quest and Ancestry.com.

Records for World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam are housed at the National Personnel Records Center and access is limited since many of these individuals are still alive.

- United States Census records are available at the Lancaster Public Library on microfilm from 1790 to 1930 (Lancaster County census only). It is also available through Heritage Quest and Ancestry.com.

Special Sources

It would be foolish however to deny that there are factors that can make African American genealogical research difficult.

Finding records for African American births, deaths, etc. for certain periods can be complicated by several issues. The records may have been kept separately, badly stored, or at times not kept at all.

In the records compiled and maintained by Lancaster County, the records for African Americans are not kept separately. There are sometimes notations next to the names regarding race, but this practice was not consistently followed.

The Lancaster County Historical Society has in its archive two sets of records which speak directly to the early African American community in Lancaster.

- ❖ **Slave Registers**, beginning around 1788, covers Lancaster County.
- ❖ **Mayor's Register of Coloured Persons**, also known as the Negro Entry Book, entries from 1820-1849, covers Lancaster City.

An article on the Mayor's Register of Coloured Persons appeared in the **Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society**. The article was entitled ***The Negro Entry Book: a document of Lancaster City's antebellum Afro-American community*** by Dr. Leroy Hopkins and appeared in volume 88, number 4 in 1984. A transcription of the document is appended to the article. The journal can be accessed at the Historical Society or at the Lancaster Public Library.