

Genealogical Resources for Pennsylvania

The problems: Most counties did not start recording marriages until the 1880's. Therefore, much of your research effort in Pennsylvania genealogies will consist of locating and interpreting documents that serve as substitutes for civil marriage records. Also, many published books are too rare to be found in most libraries.

Facts to consider:

- European settlement in Pennsylvania goes back at least to 1633.
- Some records are in German, and those in English often contain very strange spellings of non-English names.
- Because of boundary disputes, some records are in New York, Connecticut, Maryland, or Virginia.
- First sale of state lands generated voluminous records, but many of the original owners were speculators.
- Much of the state is mountainous; new towns were being established for mining and logging as late as the 1880's.
- Most church records and cemetery records have not been published.
- Apart from the vital records that were not recorded by the counties, the volume of records held by the counties and the state is staggering, and much of it has not been published or microfilmed.

Research strategy:

- Study census records thoroughly, refer to maps to understand township and ward boundaries, always review original census records for unexpected spellings.
- Check all the indexes in the Pennsylvania Archives series, and track down the original documents if possible.
- Review microfilmed deed indexes at the county level, watch for unexpected spellings, obtain copies of documents of interest. Deed books frequently contain agreements, donations, nuncupative wills, and documents relating to probates.
- Use finding aids to locate church records, cemetery records, family histories, and military records. Vast inventories and indexes relating to these records have been microfilmed by the Family History Library.
- Use correspondence and the internet to track down records that have not been microfilmed.
- Find newspaper records! Some libraries have already indexed early newspapers, some abstracts have been published, but most of the newspapers you need will have to be examined at the State Library of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg, or on microfilm through interlibrary loan. Newspapers are an important source for genealogical information even in remote counties and even in the early 1800's.
- Study the Family History Library Catalogue at state, county, township, and town levels to discover additional sources.
- Get a copy of the Pennsylvania Research Outline on the internet or at your local Family History Center!

Finding Aids and Major Collections on Microfilm, a *small* selection from the Pennsylvania Research Outline:

Pennsylvania Archives (1851-1935), 135 volumes in 9 series with indexes, 65 microfilm reels starting with 0824438, or 302 microfiche starting with 6051521. Many large libraries have all 135 volumes (Los Angeles Public Library, for example), and most of those libraries also have at least one additional book explaining what is included in each series.

State Library of Pennsylvania, *General Surname Card Index*, 42 microfilm reels starting with 1002825.

Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania, *Manuscript Card Catalogue*, 8 microfilm reels starting with 0377629. (Many of the collections mentioned have been filmed.)

Historical Society of Pennsylvania, *Genealogical Collections*, 14 microfilm reels starting with 0540684.

WPA, *Inventory of Pennsylvania Church Archives*, 72 microfilm reels starting with 1014729.

Pennsylvania State Archives, *Military Abstract Card File, Revolutionary War*, 42 microfilm reels starting with 1205961, and *Civil War Veterans Card File*, 80 microfilm reels starting with 1205205.

Card Index of Pennsylvania Germans etc., 38 microfilm reels starting with 1204985.

Chester County Historical Society, *Notes on Immigrants to Pennsylvania 1681-1737*, 14 microfilm reels starting with 0567010. (Many large collections of this society have been filmed.)

Pennsylvania State Library, *Inventory of Newspapers* (1984), on microfilm reel 1320895, item 16.