



UNLOCKING THE KEYSTONE STATE

Presented by Kate Townsend

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VITAL RECORDS

BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS – 1852 TO 1854

There was a short period of time when Pennsylvania attempted to maintain vital records on a county level from 1852 to 1854. These records are accessible in the following collections available on Ancestry.com:

- [Pennsylvania, U.S., Births, 1852-1854](#)
- [Pennsylvania, U.S., Deaths, 1852-1854](#)

BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS – 1893 TO 1906

From 1893 to 1906, birth and death records were maintained with the county in Pennsylvania. These records are typically located in the individual county in which they occurred. However, the records are not necessarily in the county courthouse. You might also need to check the following to see where these records are located: county historical society, FamilySearch Wiki, local library, or local genealogical society.

CERTIFIED COPIES OF BIRTH AND DEATH RECORDS - 1906 TO PRESENT

The Pennsylvania Bureau of Health Statistics maintains birth certificates and death certificates from 1906 to the present. The records began to be compiled statewide in Pennsylvania in 1906.

Certified copies of birth certificates and death certificates from 1906 to the present may be requested online using the following link: <https://mycertificates.health.pa.gov/>. Please note that there are restrictions regarding who can order either a birth or death certificate. Check the website for details.

NON-CERTIFIED COPIES OF BIRTH RECORDS (1906 TO 1917) AND DEATH RECORDS (1906 TO 1972)

Non-certified copies of birth certificates from 1906 to 1917 and non-certified copies of death certificates from 1906 to 1972 are available through the Pennsylvania State Archives. These records can be requested via a mail-in request form available on their website: <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Research-Mail-Email.aspx>.

Indices for birth records in Pennsylvania from 1906 to 1917 are available online: <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Birth-Indices.aspx>.

Indices for death records in Pennsylvania from 1906 to 1972 are available online: <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Death-Indices.aspx>.

In addition, Ancestry.com maintains the following collections of Pennsylvania birth and death records post-1906:

- [Pennsylvania, U.S., Birth Certificates, 1906-1913](#)
- [Pennsylvania, U.S., Death Certificates, 1906-1969](#)

MARRIAGE RECORDS

From 1852-1854, marriage records were briefly recorded on the County level in Pennsylvania. The records for Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, can be accessed using the following collection on Ancestry.com: [Pennsylvania, U.S., Marriages, 1852-1854](#).

Since 30 September 1885, marriage records have been issued by the Clerk of Orphans' Court in Pennsylvania. Marriage Records are typically accessible from the Marriage License Department in an individual county and maintained by the Clerk of the Orphans' Court. There are also collections on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org of Pennsylvania marriage records. However, some of these collections only contain images of the docket entries for the marriage, and/or they are not comprehensive for all counties in Pennsylvania. It is best to contact an individual county to obtain a copy of the marriage license application and marriage license return.

DIVORCE RECORDS

The index to divorce records can be found in the Ejectment & Miscellaneous Index located in the Department of Court Records for an individual county. These records often need to be ordered separately after identifying a listing in the index.

COURT RECORDS

FEDERAL COURT RECORDS

Records of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania are housed at the National Archives and Records Administration in Philadelphia:

14700 Townsend Road
Philadelphia, PA 19154-1096
Phone: 215-305-2044
Email: philadelphia.archives@nara.gov
Website: <https://www.archives.gov/philadelphia>

Bankruptcy records of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania and the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania are housed at the National Archives at Kansas City:

400 West Pershing Road
Kansas City, MO 64108
Phone: 816-268-8000
Email: kansascity.archives@nara.gov
Website: <https://www.archives.gov/kansas-city>

Copies of federal court records can be ordered from the National Archives and Records Administration using the following link:

<https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline/start.swe?SWECmd=Start&SWEHo=eservices.archives.gov>

STATE COURT RECORDS

Civil and criminal records are available from the Department of Court Records for the individual county in Pennsylvania.

In addition, records prison and workhouse records which include records of criminal offenses, are included in the following collection available from Ancestry.com: [Pennsylvania, U.S., Prison, Reformatory, and Workhouse Records, 1829-1971](#).

PROBATE

Probate records from the county's inception to the present are typically available in the county Wills/Orphans' Court. However, the records are not necessarily in the county courthouse. You might also need to check the following to see where these records are located: county historical society, FamilySearch Wiki, local library, or local genealogical society.

REAL ESTATE RECORDS

Property deeds from the county's inception to the present are typically available in The Department of Real Estate for an individual county. Remember that deed records are typically maintained by a parent county (if applicable). There are two sets of index books the Deed Direct (organized by grantor) and the Deed Absectum (organized by grantee). The Department of Real Estate also maintains mortgage records for an individual county. FamilySearch Wiki for an individual county can direct you to browsable images or other online collections of these records.

It should also be noted that the Pennsylvania State Archives maintains the first records of land in Pennsylvania dating back to the colonial period and/or early statehood.

TAX RECORDS

The availability of surviving tax records varies from Pennsylvania county to county. Suggest going to FamilySearch Wiki to see what records are available in an individual county. These records are often maintained in a local historical society, library, or archive.

STATE INSTITUTIONAL RECORDS

The Pennsylvania State Archives maintains State Institutional Records for facilities including Dixmont, Mayview, and Woodville. The documentation available to researchers depends on the time period and the facility. However, it is possible to access documents, including an admission card, death record, and commitment documentation.

Records are available to the public 50 years after the patient's death upon providing proof of the death (i.e., with a death certificate). Records are available to the public 75 years after creating the most recent document.

CITY DIRECTORIES

City Directories are the equivalent of looking at the White Pages. However, they also include occupation information. They are an excellent tool to help fill in the “gaps” between the United States Federal Census.

[Historic Pittsburgh](#) maintains a collection of city directories for Pittsburgh.

[Internet Archive](#) and the [Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania](#) maintain city directories for Philadelphia.

In addition, local libraries, historical societies, and archives might maintain city directories and/or telephone directories for various counties and cities in Pennsylvania.

PENNSYLVANIA REPOSITORIES

DETRE LIBRARY & ARCHIVES AT THE SENATOR JOHN HEINZ HISTORY CENTER

The [Detre Library & Archives](#) at the Senator John Heinz History Center has a wealth of genealogical information including, but not limited to, the following:

- 700,000 photographs, prints, and negatives
- 40,000 books, pamphlets, and monographs
- 3,500 individual archival collections of families, organizations, businesses, and industries
- 600 periodical titles
- 500 maps and atlases

GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The [Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania](#) has numerous collections relevant to family history researchers, including, but not limited to, the following:

- 1500 books
- Birth Records
- Church Records
- Family Histories

HISTORIC PITTSBURGH

[Historic Pittsburgh](#) is an online virtual archive comprising of primary and secondary sources about the greater Pittsburgh region. Resources include, but are not limited to, maps, images, local histories, and city directories.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The [Historical Society of Pennsylvania](#) maintains genealogical relevant collections, including, but not limited to, books, newspapers, manuscripts, and personal papers.

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT COLLECTIONS AT THE CARNEGIE LIBRARY OF PITTSBURGH

The [Pennsylvania Department Collections at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh](#) maintains numerous genealogical relevant collections including, but not limited to, newspaper clippings, maps, portrait index as well as vital records.

It should also be noted that the [Western Pennsylvania Genealogical Society](#) maintains a collection of genealogically relevant materials within the Pennsylvania Department of Collections at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. This collection includes materials like published family histories, church histories, morgue records, and cemetery records focusing on Allegheny County, Pennsylvania.

PENNSYLVANIA STATE ARCHIVES

The [Pennsylvania State Archives](#) maintains numerous records relevant to Pennsylvania research including, but not limited to, the following: land warrant applications, vital records, state institutional records, and state prison records.

STATE LIBRARY OF PENNSYLVANIA

The [State Library of Pennsylvania](#) maintains collections relevant to Pennsylvania researchers, including family histories, county histories, city directories, land warrant maps, and church records.

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

The [University of Pittsburgh Archives & Special Collections](#) maintains historical documents, coroner's records, photographs, maps, newspapers, and rare books, among other items pertaining to Western Pennsylvania history.