Pennsylvania Research: Four Centuries of History and Genealogy

Class 2: 18th Century, Birthplace of America

Kimberly Mannisto, Researcher, kim.mannisto@nehgs.org

History

- William Penn’s influence continued to shape the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania during the 18th century and offer immigrants:
  - Religious freedom, a liberal form of government, affordable land, and a chance at prosperity.
- In 1701, William Penn created a “Charter of Privileges” for the people of his colony that governed how the colony was to be run:
- The boundary lines for the state of Pennsylvania remained in dispute throughout much of the 18th century and Connecticut, Virginia and Maryland laid claim to areas now part of Pennsylvania:
  - Interactive map of county formations - [https://www.mapofus.org/pennsylvania/](https://www.mapofus.org/pennsylvania/)
- Important migratory roadways through Pennsylvania in the 18th century included the Forbes Road, Braddock’s Road, and Great Wagon Road:

The People

- The major immigrant groups that arrived in Pennsylvania throughout the 18th century tended to affiliate with certain religions denominations:
  - English and Welsh – Society of Friends (Quakers) and Anglican (Church of England)
  - Germans – Lutheran or Reformed Lutheran
  - Scots-Irish – Presbyterian
  - Huguenots – French Protestants
  - Swiss – Mennonites/Anabaptists
Non-Quaker English and Welsh

- 18th century English immigrants were not just Quakers– they were also Anglicans who were members of the Church of England:
  - Christ Church of Philadelphia- [https://christchurchphila.org/collections-genealogy/](https://christchurchphila.org/collections-genealogy/)
  - By 1710, there were Anglican congregations in several settlements in present day Berks and Montgomery counties and in 1761, a second church, St. Peter’s, was constructed in Philadelphia—
    - Use FamilySearch research wiki to search by county and denomination.
- The Welsh continued to settle on thirty thousand acres of land granted to the Welsh by William Penn, along the Delaware River, in an area known as the Welsh Tract— now in present day Delaware and Maryland:
- In 1746, Welsh settlers built the Welsh Tract Baptist Church which was prominent in the 18th century:
  - ”Records of the Welsh Tract Baptist Meeting, Pencader Hundred, New Castle County, Delaware, 1701 to 1828” on FamilySearch.

Quakers

- Quakers had Monthly, Quarterly, and Yearly Meetings:
  - The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM) on Arch Street, served as the location for the Friends yearly meeting for much of the early 18th century.
  - Monthly Meetings records included births, deaths, marriages, burials, removals and certificates and Meeting Minutes:
  - Original marriage records are on Ancestry- “U.S., Quaker Meeting Records, 1681-1935”
- Special Quaker records collections are at:
  - The Haveford College (Orthodox), Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College (Hicksite), and Bryn Mawr College (Orthodox). Digital records can be found through at the TriCollege Libraries Digital Collections-[https://digitalcollections.tricolib.brynmawr.edu](https://digitalcollections.tricolib.brynmawr.edu)
Quakers were staunch pacifists who were against war or armed uprisings.

- Their faith demanded they support soldiers on both sides of the war, and many Quakers were arrested, had their land seized, and even exiled to Virginia.
- Several letters and diaries have been digitized about the Quakers' hardships during the Revolutionary War and can be found at https://www.amphilsoc.org/blog/revolutionary-phl-exiled-philadelphia-quakers-during-revolution

Other Quaker resources include:

- The Quaker Collection on Ancestry - https://www.ancestry.com/cs/quakers
- “U.S., Surname Index to Quaker Records” on Ancestry - https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3042/
- Quaker Genealogy subject guide on American Ancestors - https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/quaker-genealogy
- The Dictionary of Quaker Biography by Edwin B. Bonner – locate a copy near you on https://www.worldcat.org
- Immigration of Irish Quakers to Pennsylvania, by Albert Cook Myers - locate a copy near you on https://www.worldcat.org
Germans

- Waves of German immigrants to Pennsylvania arrived between 1708 and 1740 and settled primarily in southeastern Pennsylvania:
  - The first wave arrived primarily from the Rhineland and the Palatinate areas, but also hailed from areas in Switzerland and German Denominations included German Reformed, Lutheran, Mennonite and Amish, Dunkard, Moravian, and Roman Catholics.

- The term Pennsylvania Dutch (Pennsilfaanisch Deitsch) refers to the combined unique language and culture of the people:
  - In the 18th century, the word "Dutch" referred to a large area in Europe that included present day Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Austria and Switzerland.

- The Lutheran and Reformed congregations kept pretty good records and church records called registers include births, baptisms, marriages, and burials:
  - Frederick S. Weiser and Paul Miller Ruff have several books on Lutheran church records.
  - Records are in German, but transcriptions often exist. Use resources like the German Genealogical Word List to help you decipher German records- [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/German_Genealogical_Word_List](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/German_Genealogical_Word_List) or translators- [https://www.deepl.com/en/translator](https://www.deepl.com/en/translator)

- Non-British settlers, including German immigrants, had to sign Oaths when they landed in Philadelphia swearing allegiance to King George II and the proprietors of Pennsylvania before entering the city:
  - See Pennsylvania German Pioneers by Ralph Beaver Strassburger and edited by John Hinke that contains passenger lists of German immigrants (usually males 16 and older) who landed in the Port of Philadelphia between 1727-1808:
    - All three volumes can be found on Hathi Trust and/or FamilySearch and you can search volumes I and II on Ancestry.
    - Volume I–A lists =Captain’s Lists, B= Oaths of Allegiance to King, C= Oaths Abjuring the Pope
    - Volume 2–Passenger signatures
    - Volume 3– Post-Revolutionary War lists and indices
Mennonite/Anabaptist

- The 18th century wave of Mennonites were mostly Swiss-Germans and they settled mainly in Lancaster and Montgomery counties.
  - Records are scarce because the group was heavily persecuted and killed in their homelands.

Moravians

- If your ancestors arrived in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania between 1741 and 1753 they were possibly Protestant dissenters and followers of the German nobleman Count Nicolaus Von Zinzendorf of Saxony, Germany. They ran a successful settlement between 1741 and 1762:
  - Contact the Moravian Archives about records: https://www.moravianchurcharchives.org/about/
  - The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia: https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/mennonites/

Other German Resources include:

- Guides to researching your German ancestors are available at AmericanAncestors - https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/german-genealogy
- Also see AmericanAncestors “German Genealogy” subject guide - https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/german-genealogy
- Colonial Pennsylvania immigrants Freinsheim in the Palatinate by Annette K. Burgert

Scots-Irish

- The political climate in Ireland brought two major waves of Scots-Irish emigrants in the 18th century, primarily from Ulster in Northern Ireland and major waves occurred between 1710-1776 and 1780-1820.
- They were predominantly Presbyterians escaping religious persecution and poverty.
- Marriage records and meeting records may be the best source of information.
  - Pennsylvania, Lutheran Baptisms and Marriages” on Ancestry.
  - “U.S. Presbyterian Records, 1701-1970” on Ancestry
  - Consult the Presbyterian Historical Society in Philadelphia- https://www.history.pcusa.org
  - The Scotch-Irish of Colonial Pennsylvania, by Wayland F. Dunaway
Huguenots

- French Protestant groups arrived in Pennsylvania after previously escaping religious persecution in Europe and settling in Germany’s Palatine region, England, Ireland, and Scandinavia.
- They arrived in the early 18th century and settled primarily in areas that became known as the Oley Valley in Berks County and Pequea Creek in Lancaster County:
  - “Annals of the Oley Valley in Berks County” on Ancestry.
- They were often misidentified as Pennsylvania German’s because they had a tenancy to assimilated with local German groups:
  - Use the FamilySearch wiki or catalog to locate German Lutheran and Reformed Church records.
  - Read local histories in areas where you suspect your French ancestors settled.
  - Join DNA projects on sites like FamilytreeDNA.com.

Record Collections

Vital Records

- Sources for vital information are church records, bible records, and cemetery records:
  - Many records are still undigitized, so contact the local churches or denominational archives regarding their collections.
  - “Pennsylvania, Church Marriages, 1682-1976 ”on FamilySearch
  - Search for your ancestor on Find a Grave and in record collections like the “Pennsylvania Cemetery Records, ca. 1700-ca 1950” on FamilySearch- https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/3743478
  - Internment.net- allows you to search by state and county- http://www.interment.net/us/pa/index.htm
  - Contact local historical societies for cemetery transcriptions or other burial record collections.
  - The Tombstone Transcription Project (by county)- http://www.usgwttombstones.org/pennsylvania/pennsyl.html

- Census Records, Tax Lists, and Directories
  - 1790 U.S. Federal Census
  - “Pennsylvania, U.S. Septennial Census, 1779-1863,” on Ancestry
The “Pennsylvania, U.S. Compiled Census and Census Substitutes Index, 1772-1890” and the “U.S., Census Reconstructed Records, 1660-1820” both on Ancestry.

Directories were first introduced in the 18th century but are limited to the city of Philadelphia for the years 1785, 1792, and 1793-1922. They can be located on Fold3-https://www.fold3.com/publication/451/city-directories-philadelphia

“Pennsylvania U.S. Direct Tax Lists of 1798” on Ancestry

Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration, 1768–1801” both on Ancestry.

“Secretary of the Land Office. Rent rolls, 1703-1744” - at a local FamilySearch center or affiliated library.


Land Records

- Often land that was available for purchase was not surveyed, so the full process to purchase land entailed having an:
  - Application- A request for a survey of the land.
  - Warrant- an order for the survey to be taken.
  - Survey- measurements were recorded along with the names of adjoining landowners.
  - Return of Survey- a complete description of the land surveyed.
  - Patent- A documents regarding the sale of the land with title.
  - Deeds- document regarding a sale of land (already surveyed) naming both the grantor and grantee.

- For the surveys, return of surveys, and patent history see “Land Records,” at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, - https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Land-Records-Overview.aspx
- If your ancestors lived in northern Pennsylvania once claimed by Connecticut, records may be in the Susquehanna Company Papers on the Internet Archives-https://archive.org/details/susquehannahcomp00susq/page/n485/mode/2up
- For early land transactions see “Early Pennsylvania Land Records” on Ancestry-https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/48381/
- Index to old rights in Bucks and Chester Counties, 1682-1761, Pennsylvania Surveyor General and Index to old rights in Philadelphia County, 1682-1748, Pennsylvania Surveyor General, both on FamilySearch
- Pennsylvania Land Records: A History and Guide for Research, by Donna Bingham Munger
Passenger Lists and Naturalization

- Starting in 1727, all non-British immigrants were required to take an oath to King George II and an Oath Abjuring the Pope before entering the city of Philadelphia:
  - Filby’s Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, by William P. Filby on Ancestry.
  - For people naturalized between 1740 and 1772 see the collection “Pennsylvania Naturalizations, 1740-73” on Ancestry - https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/4259/
  - “A collection of upwards of thirty thousand names of German, Swiss, Dutch, French and immigrants in Pennsylvania from 1727-1776” - https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/10412/
  - Names of Persons Who Took the Oath of Allegiance to the State of Pennsylvania Between the Years 1777-1789” - https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/48371/
  - Also try searching “Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, 1500-1900s” on Ancestry.

- Immigrants that arrived in bondage or as Indentured Servants:
  - Search for your ancestor in the digitized collection at the American Philosophical Society Library - https://diglib.amphilsoc.org/islandora/object/record-indentures-individuals-bound-out-apprentices-servants-etc-and-german-and#page/1/mode/1up
  - Colonial Newspaper “Runaway” notices- genealogybank.com
  - Consult Runaways of Colonial New Jersey Indentured Servants, Slaves, Deserters and Prisoners, 1720-1781 by Richard B. Marin which includes Pennsylvania runaway notices - locate a copy on-https://www.worldcat.org

Military Records

- The first militias were organized in Pennsylvania in 1777 and prior to that, there were no military groups organized under the Penn family:
  - Colonial and Revolutionary families of Pennsylvania; genealogical and personal memoirs on Ancestry
• “Pennsylvania, Oaths of Allegiance Lists” taken between 1777-1778 on FamilySearch
  https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/48371/
• Revolutionary War pension records and the Pennsylvania Archives “Militia and Revolutionary War Lists” on Fold3-
  – We highly recommend ordering the full pension record for your ancestor from the National Archives- https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/pre-ww-1-records
• If your ancestors were ”Loyalist,” try-
  o “Pennsylvania, Supreme Executive Council, Forfeited Estate File, 1777-1790”
    https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/685427?availability=Family%20History%20Library

Court and Probate Records

• Wills and probate records in Pennsylvania are kept at the county level in one of two court offices:
  o The Register of Wills holds the wills.
  o The Orphans Court kept records regarding real estate divisions and documents regarding minor children.
• To locate wills and probate records as well as administrations- always try to locate original records when possible:
  o “Pennsylvania, Wills and Probate Records, 1683-1993” on Ancestry
  o Use the catalog option on FamilySearch to search by county and locate the appropriate collection.
  o Use Pennsylvania USGenWeb Archive to locate surnames in wills and expand families.

Research and Subject Guides

• Pennsylvania Genealogy, AmericanAncestors.org -
  https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/pennsylvania-genealogy
• Pennsylvania German, AmericanAncestors.org -
  https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/pennsylvania-german
• Quaker Genealogy, AmericanAncestors.org –
  https://www.americanancestors.org/tools/quaker-genealogy
• The Portable Genealogist: Pennsylvania Research via American Ancestors bookstore-
  https://shop.americanancestors.org/search?q=Portable+Genealogist+Pennsylvania
• Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission- https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Research-Guides.aspx
• Historical Society of Pennsylvania “Subject Guide: Family History & Genealogy”-
  https://www.portal.hsp.org/subject-guides/subject-guide-11
Repositories, Magazines, and other sites

- The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
- Historical Society of Pennsylvania
- ldsgenealogy.com- https://ldsgenealogy.com
- Pennsylvania Genealogy-https://pennsylviangienealogy.org
- Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine on AmericanAncestors

Other Helpful Resources

- Convert between Old & New Style Dates-http://aulis.org/Calendar/Old_%26_New_Style_Dates.html
- “Creating a Research Plan for Cluster Research,” by Lindsay Fulton-https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFA_IfMsThg
- Ann Lawthers, webinar "Resources for Pennsylvania Resources at Americanancestors.org https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbjDPwC70_0

Published Sources, Indexes, and Guides

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  https://pennsylviangienealogy.org/statewide/organization-of-counties-in-pennsylvania.htm
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  https://paconservationheritage.org/stories/the-walking-purchase/
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  https://collections.lancasterhistory.org/media/library/docs/edit_vol95no3pp74_85.pdf
- Naina Pottamkulam, “Why are the Pennsylvania Dutch called so when they’re actually German” 28 May 2020,
  https://www.iamexpat.de/lifestyle/lifestyle-news/why-pennsylvania-dutch-are-called-so-when-theyre-actually-german
- New River Notes, “History of the Welch Tract Baptist Church,”
  https://www.newrivernotes.com/history-welsh-tract-baptist-church/
- Sarah Sharp, Global Educator for World Heritage Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania,
  “Understanding Philadelphia’s global trade network in the colonial period,” 24 March 2017,
  https://hsp.org/blogs/educators-blog/understanding-philadelphia's-global-trade-network-colonial-period
- Michael Schreiber, Philadelphia’s rich maritime history, 29 August 2019,
  https://philahistory.org/2019/08/29/philadelphias-rich-maritime-history/