Delaware Genealogy Research

Early Inhabitants
The earliest known residents of the area now called Delaware were the Lenape people. They occupied the entire basin of the Delaware River in east Pennsylvania and south New York, together with most of New Jersey and Delaware. This was the home territory of the Algonquin peoples, the place from which most of the tribes originated. They called themselves Lenape or Leni-lenape, meaning ‘real men,’ or ‘native, genuine men.’ The Lenape peoples were a confederacy. They lived in small communities made up mostly of extended family members. The men would hunt or fish during the day. Depending on the season they might search for clams off the Jersey shore or hunt in the woods. The women worked in the gardens. They grew squash, beans, sweet potatoes, and corn. The English called them the Delaware, from the name of their principal river; the French called them Loups, ‘wolves,’ a term probably applied originally to the Mahican on Hudson rivers, afterward extended to the Munsee division and to the whole group.

By priority of political rank and because they occupied the central home territory, the Lenape were accorded the respectful title of “grandfather” by all the Algonquian tribes and by the Huron people.

The Nanticoke, Conoy, Shawnee, and Mahican claimed close connection with the Lenape (Delaware) and preserved the tradition of a common origin.

For more details of Lenape history, see AccessGenealogy.com, Delaware Tribe, at http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/delaware-tribe.htm

Delaware Native Americans who did not assimilate were forced to migrate westward when European colonists began governing the Delaware area. In the 1820’s some of the Lenape moved to Texas, becoming known as the Southern Band of Delaware Indians.

Lenape migrated many times, moving into Ohio, Kansas, Texas and finally, Indian Territory. Many of the Delaware Tribe agreed to purchase a piece of land in Indian Territory from the Cherokee Nation. By 1869, most of the Delaware had moved there.

The agencies, or field offices, of the Bureau of Indian Affairs recorded most of the records pertaining to individual Native Americans.

The Delaware Nation is currently found primarily in western Oklahoma. Their contact information is:
Address:
P.O. Box 825
Anadarko, OK 73005
Phone: 405.247.2448

The Delaware Nation website is http://delawarenation.com/

Although they are not recognized as a tribe by the Federal Government, the Nanticoke people in Delaware today have an organization.

Nanticoke Indian Association
Rt. 4, Box 107A
Millsboro, DE 19966

European Settlement
- 1609: Henry Hudson discovered Delaware Bay.
- 1627: First settlement by the Swedes.
- 1631: The Dutch built a fort at Zwaanendael (Lewes, Sussex, Delaware) and called it New Netherland. They were eventually driven out by Native Americans.
- 1638: New Sweden: Swedes and Finns began settling in the Fort Christina area (Wilmington and New Castle). The Swedes controlled the area until 1655.
• 1651: The Dutch built a fort near Newcastle.
• 1655: New Sweden was conquered by the Dutch and was named New Netherland. More Dutch and Finns settled there, along with some Mennonites.
• 1664: New Netherland, including Delaware, became a British colony as part of an Anglo-Dutch war. The Duke of York governed the area.
• 1682-1776: By deeds executed in 1682, Delaware became the “three lower counties” of Pennsylvania” over the objections of Maryland’s claims as far north as Philadelphia. William Penn introduced the English tradition of “hundreds” as subdivisions of counties, and Delaware is the only place in the U.S. where the term is still used today, mostly as a geographical description in wills, deeds, and assessment records. Delaware developed its own provincial assembly by 1704.
• 1684-1736: The colonial government of Maryland laid claim to southern and western Delaware.
• 1701: Delaware was formally separated from Pennsylvania.
• 1703: First separate assembly was convened. They shared the same governor with Pennsylvania.
• 1710: Settlers came from Scotland to Appoquinimy, Kent County. This became known as Drawyer’s Settlement.
• 1758: Men were raised for an expedition to Canada in the French and Indian War.
• 1775: Richard Penn resigned his jurisdiction. A constitution was formed by the people.
• 1776: Delaware declared its independence from Britain and established a government separate from that of Pennsylvania. It has been estimated that about half the population was Loyalist, although there was not as great an exodus from the colony as there was from New York and New Jersey. After the Revolutionary War, many soldiers headed south to Georgia, where they took advantage of attractive land grants.
• 1787: Calling itself the “First State,” Delaware was the first of the former thirteen colonies to ratify the Constitution on 7 December 1787.
• 1800 to mid-1800’s: The Dutch had imported some slaves to the area from Africa, but Maryland planters brought the largest number of African Americans to Delaware. By the time of the Civil War, however, the number of slaves had decreased substantially, mostly through manumission.
• 1861-1865: During the Civil War, Delaware was a Union state. It was economically tied to the North because of river trade and the coming of the railroads. However, some citizens sympathized with the South.

Delaware Slavery Records
• Slaves in Delaware are sometimes mentioned in deeds, in wills, in tax records, and in court order books.
• A few Parish Registers list slaves who attended church with their masters.
• "New Castle County Licenses to Import and Export Slaves, Issued by Superior Court,” by Mary Fallon Richards; Delaware Genealogical Society Journal 1, no. 1 (October 1980). The master is listed, with the names of the slaves, their ages, transported from where to where, dates, and other information.

Delaware Church Records
Many religious groups have kept records of Delaware families. Before 1900 the largest denominations were the Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Quakers.
Books:
- *Directory of Churches and Religious Organizations in Delaware* is a transcription of the registers and minutes of nearly 100 church records from the 1680s to the 1930s.
- *The Colonial Clergy of Maryland, Delaware, and Georgia*, by Frederick Lewis Weis, is an alphabetical listing of the clergy in Delaware from 1638-1777. It includes names, dates, and places.
- *Delaware Church Records*, by Raymond B. Clark - baptisms, marriages, deaths, and tombstone inscriptions from Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Quaker churches for the period 1686-1880.
- *The Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, Wilmington, Delaware, from 1697-1773* by Horace Burr - English translations and abstracts from the original church records.

Websites:
- *Family Search.org* and *Ancestry.com* have databases of various church records in Delaware.
- *Awesome Genealogy* has indexes of colonial church records in Delaware - [http://www.awesomegenealogy.com/churchrecords.shtml](http://www.awesomegenealogy.com/churchrecords.shtml)

Church Archives:
American Baptist Historical Society - (678) 547-6680
   3001 Mercer University Dr.
   Atlanta, GA 30341

United Methodist Archives Center – (973) 408-3125
   Drew University
   36 Madison Ave.
   Madison, NJ 07940-4007

The Presbyterian Historical Society - (215) 627-1852
   425 Lombard Street
   Philadelphia, PA 19147-1516

Diocese of Wilmington Archives (Catholic) - (302) 655-0597
   P.O. Box 2030
   Greenville, DE 19899

Friends Historical Library (Quakers) - (610) 328-8496
   Swarthmore College
   500 College Avenue
   Swarthmore, PA 19081-1399

Delaware Birth Records
Births before 1861
Church records of baptisms, marriages, deaths, and membership identify very early settlers. Indexes of Births Online:
- View indexes of Delaware Vital Records between 1680 and the 1900’s on FamilySearch.org.
- Birth Records indexed on Ancestry.com cover 1800 to 1908.

Births 1861 to 1913
Statewide registration of births began in 1861 but was discontinued in 1863. Registration resumed in 1881 and was generally complied with by 1921.

Online Indexes:
- Delaware State Birth Records 1861 to 1922, indexes and images, are on FamilySearch.org.
- View other online indexes listed above

**Births 1913 to the Present**

On July 1, 1913, the state of Delaware established a law requiring the registration of births, deaths, and marriages.

- The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services keeps birth certificates less than 72 years old. Copies of certificates may be requested in person, by mail or through Vital Chek – [https://www.vitalchek.com/](https://www.vitalchek.com/). Proof of relationship is required.

**If you don’t know the exact date of birth:**

For a fee, the Delaware Public Archives will search for births that occurred since 1913 that are **72 years or older**. The Delaware Department of Health and Social Services will search for births **less than 72 years old**; requests must be placed in person or by mail.

You can also search **Other Sources of Birth Information**:
- Church Records – especially helpful before counties or cities kept birth records
- Military Records
- Census Records
- Newspaper articles
- Cemetery Records
- Death Records

**Delaware Marriage Records**

Delaware counties began keeping marriage records as early as 1832. These records have been transferred from the counties to the Delaware Public Archives.

View indexes of Delaware Vital Records between 1680 and the 1900’s on FamilySearch.org.

**Marriages before 1847**

Online Indexes:
- Ancestry.com, *Marriages, 1744-1912*
- Ancestry.com, *Marriages, 1806-1933*
- FamilySearch.org, *Marriage Index, 1713-1953*

**Order a pre-1847 marriage record** from:

Delaware Public Archives
121 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. North
Dover, DE 19901

**Marriages 1847 to the Present**

Online Indexes: See indexes listed above and:
- FamilySearch.org, *Marriage Index, 1913-1954*

**Obtain a Delaware Marriage Record from 1847 to the present:**
• **Delaware Marriage Licenses** may be found in the **county records** where the marriage occurred.

• **Delaware Marriage Records recent to 40 years old** are housed in 3 offices of the Bureau of Vital Statistics:
  Jesse S. Cooper Bldg. - (302) 744-4549
  417 Federal Street
  Dover, DE 19901

  Chopin Building - (302) 283-7130
  258 Chapman Rd.
  Newark, DE 19702

  Thurman Adams State Service Center – (302) 856-5495
  546 S. Bedford St.
  Georgetown, DE 19947

• **Delaware Marriage Records 40 years or older**:
  Delaware Public Archives
  121 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. North
  Dover, DE 19901

**Other Sources of Marriage/Death Information:**
- Church Records
- Military Records
- Censuses
- Newspaper articles
- Funeral Home/Cemetery records
- Wills/Probate Records

**Delaware Death Records**
Some deaths in Delaware were recorded by the counties as early as 1855.

**Online Indexes of Delaware deaths:**
- FamilySearch.org: *Delaware Deaths and Burials, 1815 – 1955*; church and county records
- FamilySearch.org: *Delaware Church Deaths, 1750 – 1886*
- FamilySearch.org: Delaware, Vital Record Index Cards, 1680 – 1934
- Ancestry.com: *Delaware Death Records, 1811 - 1933*

**Deaths 1881 to the Present:**
Delaware state law began requiring records of deaths in 1913, at which time the Office of Vital Statistics was created. The law states that Delaware death records older than 40 years are open to the public. Once a record is old enough to become public it is transferred from the Office of Vital Statistics to the Delaware Public Archives.

Order a death certificate less than 40 years old from one of these offices of the Bureau of Vital Statistics:
  Jesse S. Cooper Bldg. - (302) 744-4549
  Dover, DE 19901
Order a death certificate more than 40 years old from the Delaware Public Archives:
Delaware Public Archives
121 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. North
Dover, DE 19901

Delaware Surname Books and Families
Virdin, Donald Odell. Delaware Family Histories and Genealogies- 215 published family histories about persons who lived in Delaware between the 1630s-1980s
Turner, Charles Henry Black. Genealogical Notes, Sussex & Kent Counties, Delaware . . . - family history pamphlets, articles, deeds, wills, and other original documents 1600 – 1950’s

Major Historical/Genealogical Repositories for Delaware
- Delaware Public Archives
- Delaware Historical Society – surname file, vital records compiled from family Bibles, church records, newspapers, military
- Delaware Genealogical Society
- University of Delaware Library
- Historical Society of Pennsylvania
- Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania
- Hagley Museum and Library – primarily Delaware history

Delaware Military Records
Over 4,000 men fought for independence in the Revolutionary War. During the Civil War, about 12,000 Delaware men fought for the Union and about 2,000 fought for the Confederate cause.
Delaware Civil War soldiers are named in the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors Database
The Delaware Historical Society holds military records from the Colonial era through World War 1.
The Delaware Public Archives has online guides to Revolutionary and Civil War records at https://archives.delaware.gov/collections/collections.shtml

Delaware Land Records:
Colonial and Early Land Records:
- The earliest land grants in Delaware were given by the Swedes and Dutch.
- When the English acquired the area in 1664, land grants were issued by the proprietary of James, Duke of York, in New York.
- When jurisdiction fell to William Penn in 1682, land was granted by this proprietary until the Revolutionary War. Microfilm copies of many of the Pennsylvania land grants are located at the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, UT, and at the Delaware Public Archives.

Books that may reference early landowners:
- Myers, Albert Cook, ed. Walter Wharton’s Land Survey Register, 1675-1679 - a transcript of the original register with an index
- Original Land Titles in Delaware, Commonly Known as the Duke of York Records . . . 1646 to 1679 – transcript with index
• Gehring, Charles T. Delaware Papers, Two Volumes - Volume one has transcriptions of records concerning the English period, 1664-1682. Volume two contains records relating to the Dutch period, 1648-1664. Transcript with index

• Pennsylvania. Land Office. Applications for Warrants, 1734-1865 - These land warrant applications are for Pennsylvania but include some for what is now Delaware.

• Pennsylvania. Surveyor General's Office. Applications for Warrants, 1755-1886- these warrants include some land that is now Delaware.

• Weinberg, Allen, and Thomas E. Slattery. Warrants and Surveys of the Province of Pennsylvania Including the Three Lower Counties – the three lower counties are now Delaware.

• Delaware's Fugitive Records: An Inventory of the Official Land Grant Records Relating to the Present State of Delaware - This guide refers to Delaware land records, 1682 to 1759, found in New York and Pennsylvania – it mentions microfilm copies of the records at the Delaware Public Archives.

Land Records at the Delaware Public Archives – microfilms include land ownership records and road records –

The Recorder of Deeds in each county: records of private ownership deeds, mortgages, and leases from the late 1600s to the present.

The Delaware counties provide online searchable land records databases

• New Castle County – searches are free but a fee is charged for copies - http://publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/view/slid/20766

• Sussex County - The index searches are free of charge. There is a fee for viewing images - http://publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/view/slid/20785

• Kent County - There is a fee for internet access to Recorder of Deeds indexes and images, which cover the years 1873 to the present - http://www.co.kent.de.us/recorder-of-deeds-office/deeds-web.aspx

Some early Delaware land records (Durham, MD - old Worcester, MD) are found in Maryland.

Delaware Counties
Delaware Migration Routes
Delaware River · Atlantic Coast Ports · Fall Line Road · King’s Highway

The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000. -
http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

Delaware Genealogy Research Websites
Note: Check online for the GenWeb and Genealogy Trails of the county in which your ancestor lived.

Awesome Genealogy - indexes of colonial church records in Delaware -
http://www.awesomegenealogy.com/churchrecords.shtml
Biographical and Genealogical History . . . – eBook - biographies of early settlers, prominent individuals -
https://archive.org/details/biographicalgene01runk
Delaware Families – genealogies, pedigrees, correspondence, newspaper clippings, etc. -
Delaware, Newberry Library Atlas of Historical County Boundaries -
http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/pages/Delaware.html
Delaware Public Archives – click Digital Archives to view links to Civil War, naturalization and probate records, historical maps - click Research Room, then Collection Gateway to search indexes of bastardy bonds, death registers and probate records - http://archives.delaware.gov/index.shtml
Online County Histories - http://www.learnwebskills.com/family/countyhistories1.htm#il

Delaware African American Research
Access Genealogy – links by state to websites of African American genealogy, cemeteries, censuses and more
AfricaMap – track the slave trade with historical overlays and geographical data -
http://worldmap.harvard.edu/africamap/
AfriGeneas – slave records, death and marriage records, censuses, surnames – chat or send messages to other researchers - http://afrigeneas.com/
Free African Americans in the Southeast - Free people of color in the colonies of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, and Delaware – a few families in Illinois, Tennessee and Indiana -
http://www.freeafricanamericans.com/
Petitions for Freedom, Manumissions, Court Records and Deeds – Delaware Public Archives -
http://archives.delaware.gov/index.shtml
Digital Library on American Slavery – search database of slave petitions, runaway slave advertisements, bills of sale, transatlantic slave trade database; this compilation of various online collections started with a focus on records in North Carolina but the information includes people in all 15 slave states and Washington D.C.; more records are currently being digitized - http://library.uncg.edu/slavery/
International African American Museum - African American funeral programs, obituaries, marriage records, photos, historical documents and family histories – military records of the U.S. Colored Troops are currently being digitized - https://cfh.iaamuseum.org/records/
Last Seen: Finding Family After Slavery - search thousands of “Information Wanted” advertisements taken out by former slaves in all states searching for family members lost by sale, flight, or enlistment – the collection currently includes newspapers from 1853 to 1911 - http://www.informationwanted.org/
Slave Voyages - the *Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* documents vessels along the Atlantic slave routes from 1514 to 1866; *Intra-American Slave Trade Database* documents vessels traveling between the Atlantic and Pacific ports ranging from the United States to Brazil; the *African Names Database* gives names, ages, possible origins of slaves liberated from captured slave ships between 1808 and 1862 - [https://www.slavevoyages.org/](https://www.slavevoyages.org/)

**Delaware Cemetery Research**


**Delaware Military Research**

Grand Army of the Republic Records Project – developing database - histories of posts, reports of officers and members if available, search by state - [http://suvcw.org/garrecords/](http://suvcw.org/garrecords/)

**Delaware Native American Research**


Native American Tribes of Delaware - [http://www.native-languages.org/delaware.htm](http://www.native-languages.org/delaware.htm)

**Delaware Newspaper Research**

Historic Newspaper Archive - *Seaford, Sussex County* - digitizations of various years of 6 newspapers published in Seaford between 1878 and 1941 - [https://www.seafordhistoricalsociety.com/visit/newspaper-archive/](https://www.seafordhistoricalsociety.com/visit/newspaper-archive/)

Information on these pages is compiled from information in:

- The Wikis on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org
- Family Tree Magazine
- *The Weekly Genealogist, NEHGS; Dick Eastman Genealogy Newsletter; The Genealogy Newsline*