Delaware Genealogy Research

History

Native American Inhabitants

The residents of the area that is now called Delaware when Europeans arrived were called 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 into white society 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. The Lenape migrated many times, moving into Ohio, Kansas, Texas and finally, 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.

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European Settlement, continued

- 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.
- 1694: The Government is restored to William Penn.
- 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.
- Delaware was the destination of some French immigrants who arrived from the West Indies after
- the American Revolution and others who came directly from France, including the famous du
- Pont family. The mid-nineteenth century saw further immigration of large numbers of Irish
- Catholics and Germans, and by the end of the century, Jews, Poles, and Italians had arrived, with
- smaller numbers of eastern Europeans and Scandinavians. Many of these people settled in the
- Wilmington area.
- 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

Before 1900 the largest denominations were the Baptist, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Quakers. Many religious groups have kept records of Delaware families.

Books:

- *Directory of Churches and Religious Organizations in Delaware* - 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 - 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 dated 1686-1880.
- *This Is Good Country: A History of the Amish of Delaware, 1915-1988* by Allen B. Clark - the European beginnings of the Mennonite and Amish groups, their migration, and settlement in Delaware - includes traditions, names and dates.
- *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.

Online Delaware Church Records

- *Family Search.org* and *Ancestry.com* have databases of various Delaware church records, varying years
- *Awesome Genealogy* - indexes of colonial Delaware church records - http://www.awesomegenealogy.com/churchrecords.shtml

Church Archives:

American Baptist Historical Society - (678) 547-6680 - Atlanta, GA
United Methodist Archives Center – (973) 408-3125 - Madison, NY
The Presbyterian Historical Society - (215) 627-1852 - Philadelphia, PA
Diocese of Wilmington Archives (Catholic) - (302) 655-0597 - Greenville, DE
Friends Historical Library (Quakers) - (610) 328-8496 - Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA

Delaware Vital Records

Online Indexes/images:

FamilySearch.org and *Ancestry.com* - indexes of births, marriages, deaths for various years, some as early as the 1600's

The state Office of Vital Statistics stores vital records for all the counties.

Birth Records

Births before 1861

Church sacramental and membership records give birth, marriage and death information about the earliest colonial settlers.

Births 1861 to 1913

Statewide registration of births began in 1861; it was discontinued in 1863. Registration resumed in 1881 and was generally complied with by 1921.

Births 1913 to the Present

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

- The **Delaware Public Archives** houses Birth Certificates dated 1913 – 1945. The Archives website gives ordering information - http://archives.delaware.gov/help.shtml
- 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.* 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 birth records that are *72 years or older*.
The **Delaware Department of Health and Social Services** will search for birth records *less than 72 years old;* requests must be placed in person or by mail.

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.

Order a marriage record - genealogical copy or certificate - older than 50 years from the **Delaware Public Archives** in Dover. The website gives ordering information - https://archives.delaware.gov/contact-dpa/

Order a marriage certificate less than 50 years old from the **Office of Vital Statistics.** Ordering information is on the website: https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/ss/vitalstats.html

Delaware Death Records

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

Deaths 1881 to the Present:

Delaware state law began requiring records of deaths in 1913.

Order a death certificate less than 40 years old from the Office of Vital Statistics. Ordering information is on the website: https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/ss/vitalstats.html

Order a death certificate more than 40 years old from the Delaware Public Archives. The website gives ordering information - https://archives.delaware.gov/contact-dpa/

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

Books that may reference early landowners continued:

- 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

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

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. - http://archives.delaware.gov/exhibits/document/turner/toc.shtml
Delaware, Map of US – boundary changes maps - http://www.mapofus.org/delaware/
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
Immigrant Roots in Wilmington, DE – *Wilmington town records*: Catholic Sacramental Records, City Directories, Census Records, Civil Death Records, Gravestone Inscriptions - *refugees from France and Haiti - records from Counties Galway, Mayo and Donegal, Ireland* and *passenger lists*- http://www.lalley.com/index.asp?home.asp
Online County Histories - http://www.learnwebskills.com/family/countyhistories1.htm#il
State of Delaware Naturalization Records - http://archives.delaware.gov/collections/natrlzndb/nat-index.shtml

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/

Delaware African American Research continued:

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/

Delaware Cemetery Research

Wilmington Diocese Cemeteries – burial listings of Cathedral, All Saints, and Gate of Heaven cemeteries - http://www.cdow.org/catholic-diocese-of-wilmington-offices-and-ministries/catholic-cemeteries/catholic-cemeteries-burial-database-search/

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/

Delaware Native American Research

First People - Links to State Recognized Tribes, sorted by state - http://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Links/state-recognized-tribes-in-usa-by-state.html

Native American Tribes of Delaware - 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/

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*