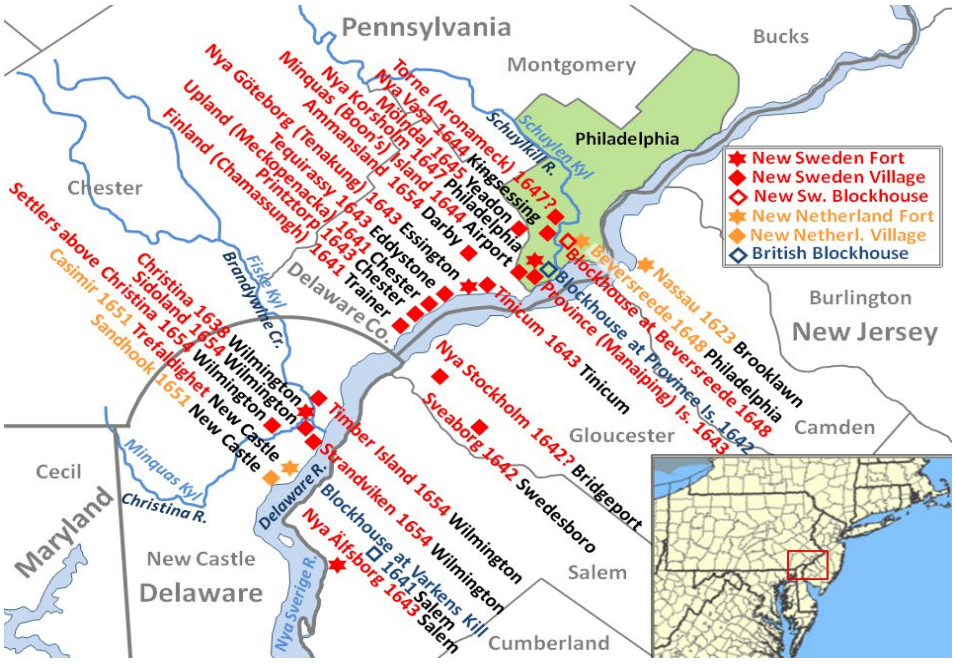
Genealogy Research in Pennsylvania



European settlers in 1638 of the area now called Pennsylvania were Swedes, Finns, and Germans. They named their territory **New Sweden**. It included parts of what are now Delaware, Maryland and West Virginia. Some early land records of southwest Pennsylvania are in Virginia.
Surveyors Mason and Dixon settled a boundary dispute by a 1763-1767 survey of the Pennsylvania/Maryland/Delaware/West Virginia border, which became known as the Mason-Dixon Line.

Pennsylvania Birth Records

Indexes:

Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org – church, city, and county birth records various years
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission website - State birth records from 1906 to 1911 - http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/default.aspx
Philadelphia City Archives Reading Room – indexes of city births July 1, 1860-June 30, 1915

Births 1852 – 1855:

Between 1852 and 1855, doctors, midwives, Justices of the Peace and clerics were required to report births to the County Register of Wills Office. However few births were reported.

Births 1855 – 1892:

The counties were not required to record births. However Philadelphia City Hall began recording city births in 1860. Pittsburgh City Hall began recording births in Pittsburgh, McKeesport, Sewickley, and Wilkinsburg in 1870.

Births 1893 – 1905:

Beginning in 1893 a new law required counties to record births. The county Clerk of Orphans Court Office

Obtain a copy of a birth record from 1852 to 1905:

- The **Register of Wills** Office or **Clerk of Orphans Court** office in the county where the child was born
- The **Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh** – 4400 Forbes Ave, Pittsburgh**:**
  - Pittsburgh City Birth records 1870 to 1905
  - McKeesport, Sewickley, and Wilkinsburg birth records 1890's – 1905
  - Allegheny County birth records 1893 to 1905

- **Philadelphia City Records Archives** – 3101 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA:
    - Philadelphia city birth records July 1, 1860-June 30, 1915

If there is no civil birth record, look for church baptism or confirmation records.

Births 1906 to the Present:
In 1906, the State of Pennsylvania began registration of births statewide. Counties were required to report all births to the state.
The Pennsylvania Department of Health publishes indexes of births from 105 or more years ago
Obtain a copy of a post-1906 birth record for a fee from the **Pennsylvania State Archives**. For information on obtaining a birth certificate see the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum website –
http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Vital-Statistics.aspx

Restrictions to obtain a Pennsylvania birth certificate of a person born within the last 105 years:
The person requesting a birth certificate must be:

- Person named on the birth certificate, who is 18 years of age or older (if under 18, immediate family member must apply), or a direct line relative of the person on the certificate
- Legal representative
- Power of Attorney (for person named on birth certificate or immediate family member)
- If the person named on the birth certificate is deceased, a person who is not an immediate family member must submit a copy of the death certificate

Pennsylvania Marriage Records

Indexes:
FamilySearch.org and *Ancestry.com*: Pennsylvania marriage records for some years and counties
Philadelphia City Archives Reading Room, 3101 Market Street, Philadelphia – computer and microfilm indexes of city marriages July 1, 1860-December 31, 1915

Marriages before 1852:
In these years marriage records were kept only by churches.

Marriages between 1852 and 1854:
Records of some marriages were kept by the county Register of Wills.

Marriages 1855 – 1884:
Civil marriage records do not exist for the years 1855 – 1884.
Some large cities have marriage registers.
Look for marriages in these years in church records.

1885 to the present: Pennsylvania counties again began keeping marriage records.
Obtain a copy of a marriage record 1852 – 1854 from the County Register of Wills office.
Obtain copies of marriage records from 1885 to the present from the County **Clerk of the Orphans Court**.

Note: If available, the **marriage license** or the **marriage register** may have more family information than the marriage certificate.

The Pennsylvania State Archives also holds the following marriage-related records:

- Governor's Accounts, 1742-1763 (Record Group 21) - lists of marriages 1742-1752 and 1759-1762.
- General Motion and Divorce Docket, 1750-1837 (Record Group 33) - references to divorces for the period 1800-1805.

More marriage-related records at the Pennsylvania State Archives:

- Marriage Bonds for Philadelphia County, 1784-1786 (Record Group 27)
- Divorce Papers, 1786-1815 (Record Group 33)
- Record and Indexes of Births, Deaths, and Marriages, 1852-1854 (Record Group 26)
- Record of Marriages, 1885-1891 (Record Group 14) - incomplete

Pennsylvania State Archives
350 North Street
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0090
www.pastatearchives.com

Pennsylvania Death Records

Indexes:

Ancestry.com and *FamilySearch.org*: church, city, and county death records various years
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission website: State death records 1906 to 1967 - http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/default.aspx
Philadelphia City Archives Reading Room –indexes of city deaths July 1, 1860-June 30, 1915

Deaths Prior to 1852:

Before 1852, no civil death records were recorded by the counties in which people died.

Deaths from 1852-1854:

Some records of deaths were kept by the Register of Wills for each county.
Obtain a copy of a death record 1852 – 1854 from the Register of Wills office in the county where the death occurred.

Deaths from 1855 – 1892:

- The **counties** stopped keeping death records in these years.
- The **city of Pittsburgh** kept records of deaths
  - deaths in Pittsburgh from 1870 – 1905
  - deaths in McKeesport 1887 – 1905
  - deaths in Sewickley 1894 - 1905

Obtain a copy of a death recorded in Pittsburgh from the **Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.** Call the library at 412.622.3114 or use the online ordering form:
https://www.carnegielibrary.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Carnegie-Library-of-Pittsburgh-Birth_Death-Register-Request-Form.pdf

Deaths 1893 – 1905:

Counties resumed keeping death records in 1893. The records are not complete.
Obtain a copy of a death record 1893 – 1905 from the **County Clerk of the Orphans Court.**

Death records 1906 to the present.

In 1906, a new law required counties to report all deaths to the state. The Pennsylvania State Department of Health began storing records of all deaths in the state. **Copies of death certificates, 1906-1967,** may be requested from the **Pennsylvania State Archives.**
The *Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission* website gives ordering information:
http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Vital-Statistics.aspx
Obtain post 1967 death certificates from the **Division of Vital Records, Pennsylvania Department of Health.**
Ordering information is on the website of the *Pennsylvania Department of Health* -
http://www.health.pa.gov/MyRecords/Certificates/Pages/11596.aspx#ordering

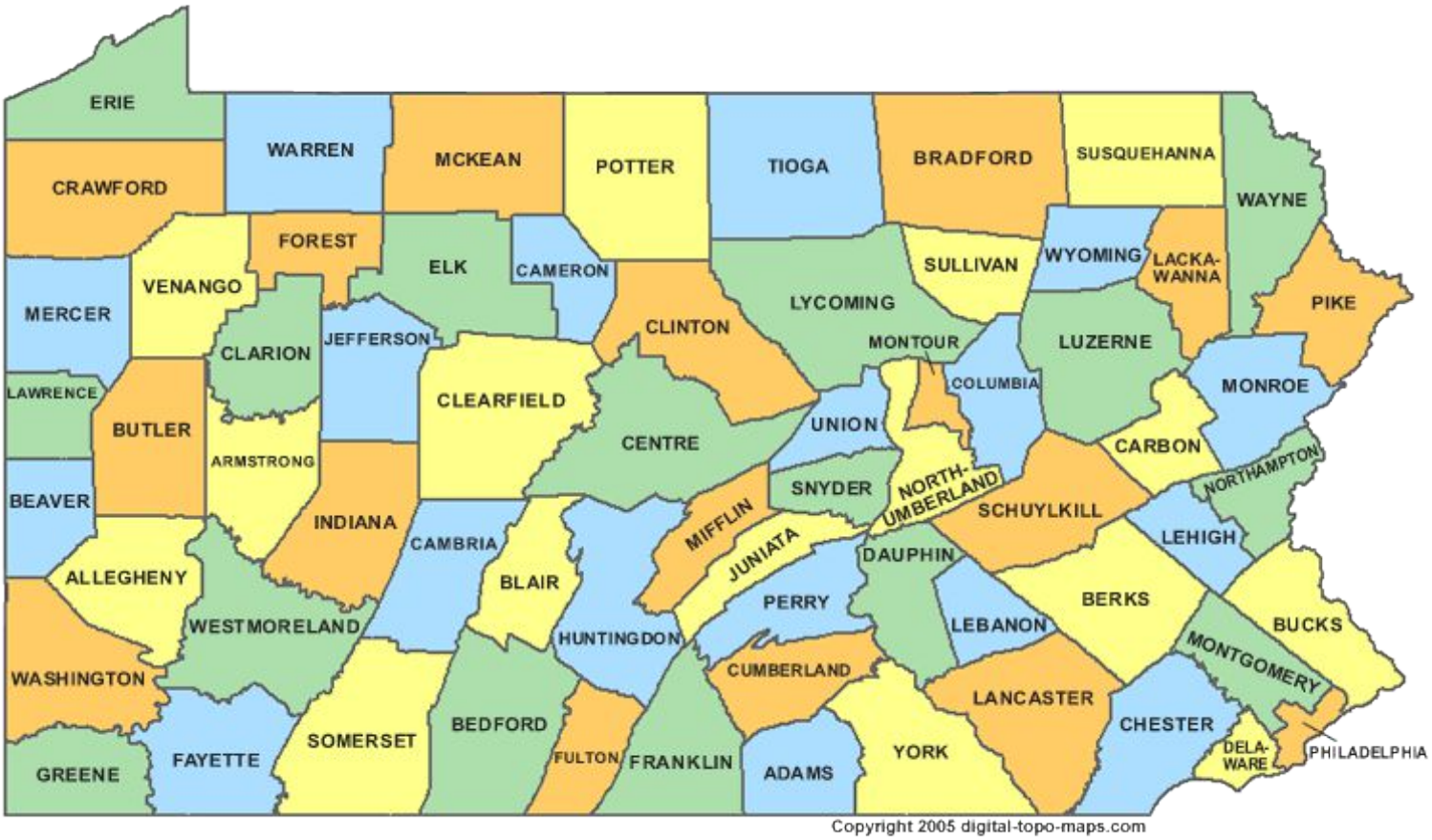
Other Records may mention a person's Birth, Marriage, or Death:

- Church records
- Family Bible Records
- Newspaper birth, marriage, and death announcements
- Censuses
- Military Records
- Funeral Home/Cemetery records/Probate records

Major Pennsylvania Genealogical Repositories

Pennsylvania State Archives - State Library of Pennsylvania - Pennsylvania State University Libraries Historical Collections - Historical Society of Pennsylvania - Haverford College - Swarthmore College - Franklin & Marshall College - National Archives Mid-Atlantic Region (Philadelphia) - New York Public Library - Schwenkfelder Library and Heritage Center – Mennonite Heritage Center

Pennsylvania Counties

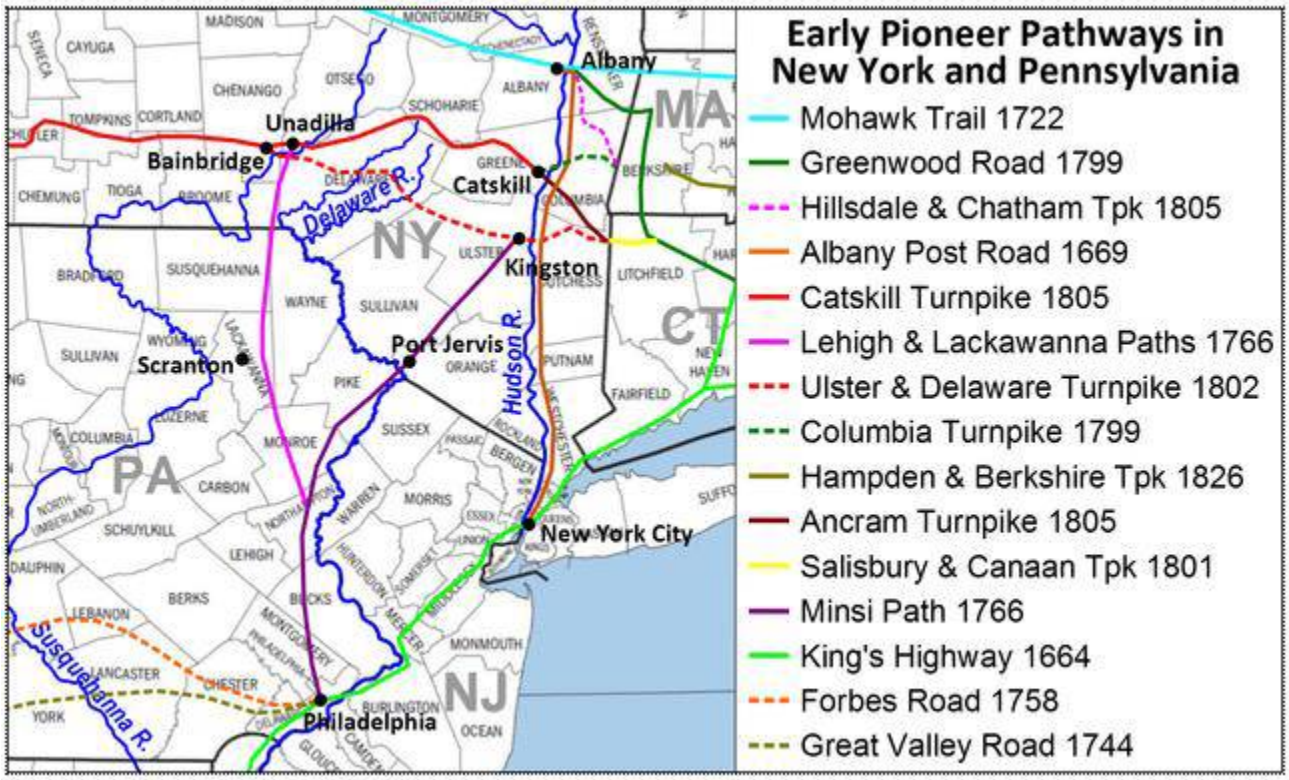


The Atlas of Historical County Boundaries – Interactive maps and text covering the historical boundaries, names, organization, and attachments of every county, extinct county and unsuccessful county proposal from the creation of the first county through December 31, 2000. - http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/index.html

Pennsylvania Migration Routes

Beaver and Erie Canal Bethlehem Pike Braddock's Road Bur d's Road Canada Road Centre Turnpike Culbertson's Path Delaware River Fall Line Road Forbes Road Gist's Trace Great Indian Warpath Great Island Path Great Shamokin Path Great Trail Great Valley Road King's Highway Kittanning Pat h Lake Erie Lake Shore Path Lehigh and Lakawanna Paths Minsi Path National Road Pennsylvania Road Philadelphia Lancaster Turnpike Schuylkill Canal Tuscarora Path Union Canal Venango Path

Indian Paths and Migration Trails in Pennsylvania: http://noel.mcn.org/Westmoreland/MigrationTrails.htm



Pennsylvania Genealogy Research Websites

NOTE: Check online for the *GenWeb* or *Genealogy Trails* of any county in which your ancestor lived.

1777 Chester County Property Atlas - an interactive online atlas that helps us trace property owners
Centre County, PA: **Centre Daily Times Obituary Index** – index, some images of obituaries from 1937 – 2014: https://collection1.libraries.psu.edu/cdm/search/collection/cdtindex/searchterm/Index%20to%20the%20Centre%20Daily%20Times%20Obituaries,%201937-2011/mode/exact
Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania – search wide variety genealogical Pennsylvania records by name, location and year - http://genpa.org/gsp-collections
Lancaster County, PA: **Lititz Public Library** – Lititz area obituary index, 1877 – 1998; newspapers; https://lititzlibrary.org/new-books-and-movies/genealogy-room/
My Genealogy Hound – *biographies* extracted from *pre-1900 county histories* of Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee – vintage county maps from Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma (including Indian Nations), and Tennessee - http://www.mygenealogyhound.com/
Online County Histories - http://www.learnwebskills.com/family/countyhistories1.htm#il
Online Pennsylvania Indexes – links to indexes of obituaries, death records, cemetery records - http://www.deathindexes.com/pennsylvania/
PA – Roots – links to transcriptions of biographies, vital records, cemetery records, military records, etc. - http://www.pa-roots.com/index.php/pabios
PA Photos and Documents – search newspapers, yearbooks, photos from Pennsylvania libraries – www.powerlibrary.org/collections
PennState University Libraries – search or browse historical digital collections - https://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/digital.html
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission – military records, indexes of birth, marriage, death and land records - http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx

Pennsylvania State Archives – links to viewable books of the history of Pennsylvania, 1852 – 1914 - http://midatlantic.rootsweb.ancestry.com/pa/PAArchives.html
State Library of PA Digital Collections – Digital collections of historical newspapers, Civil War regimental histories, obituaries – http://www.statelibrary.pa.gov/GeneralPublic/Collections/Pages/Digital-Collections-at-the-State-Library-of-Pennsylvania-.aspx

Pennsylvania African-American Research

Access Genealogy – links by state to websites of African American genealogy, cemeteries, and censuses
Africa Map – 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/
Bethel Burial Ground – an alphabetical directory of African American Philadelphians who were buried at Bethel Burying Ground from 1810 to 1864 in 400 block of Queen St. – an ongoing project - https://bethelburyinggroundproject.com/2017/08/04/current-bethel-burying-ground-name-directory-3/
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/

Pennsylvania Cemetery Research

Bethel Burial Ground – an alphabetical directory of African American Philadelphians who were buried at Bethel Burying Ground from 1810 to 1864 in 400 block of Queen St. – an ongoing project - https://bethelburyinggroundproject.com/2017/08/04/current-bethel-burying-ground-name-directory-3/
Carlisle Indian School Cemetery – burials of students - information for each person interred including the person's name, Nation, and date of decease with a collection of primary source materials – students were from a variety of Indian Nations - http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/cemetery-information
Harry Senft York and Adams County Cemetery Pictures – links to lists of cemeteries, burial transcriptions, photos of graves, link to person's information in the Hart Family Tree Database - http://midatlantic.rootsweb.ancestry.com/HarrySenft/

Pennsylvania 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/
Pennsylvania State Archives – variety of military records, various wars - http://www.digitalarchives.state.pa.us/archive.asp
Pennsylvania Civil War Soldier Deaths database (also lists injuries) on the Pennsylvania Volunteers of the Civil War website - http://www.pacivilwar.com/deaths/
Pennsylvania Revolutionary War Military Abstract Card File and the Militia Officers Index Cards, 1775 – 1800 - http://www.digitalarchives.state.pa.us.
Pennsylvania War of 1812 Soldier's Index – view alphabetical list of soldiers - http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r2-61War1812Index/r2-61%20WarOf1812Interface.htm

Pennsylvania Native American Research

Carlisle Indian School Cemetery – burials of students - an entry for each person interred including the person's name, Nation, and date of decease with a collection of primary source materials – students were from a variety of nations - http://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/cemetery-information
Native American Tribes of Pennsylvania - http://www.native-languages.org/pennsylvania.htm
State Library of PA, Native Americans – newspapers and magazines from the U.S. Indian School in Carlisle, state documents, etc. - http://digitalcollections.powerlibrary.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/sstlp-panat

Pennsylvania Newspaper Research

Harrisburg, PA, Newspaper Index – name search images of marriage and death notices from 4 newspapers, 1799 to 1827, click on link – http://digitalcollections.powerlibrary.org/cdm/search/collection/slpgenealog/searchterm/harrisburg%20newspaper%20index/field/title/mode/all/conn/and/order/nosort
Necrology Scrapbook – name search images of obituaries clipped from Pennsylvania newspapers, 1891 to 1904, includes Civil War veterans, click on link - http://digitalcollections.powerlibrary.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/slpgenealog
Pennsylvania Online Historical Newspapers – names of some Pennsylvania newspapers, publication dates, links to websites with images of newspaper pages - https://sites.google.com/site/onlinenewspapersite/Home/usa/pa
PennState University Libraries Newspaper Collection – browse or search issues of public, college, and agricultural newspapers - https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/digital-newspapers

Information on these pages is compiled from information in:
FamilySearch.org Wiki
Family Tree Magazine
Dick Eastman Genealogy Newsletter
Genealogy Gems from the Allen County Public Library
Pennsylvania Department of Health website
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission website
Online Military Indexes and Records - http://www.militaryindexes.com/index.html