

# Guide to Birth Records

## Chester County Archives

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Chester County kept birth records for the years 1852-1855 and 1893-1906. In **1906** the State of Pennsylvania began keeping the records. Other than the listed years the county **did not** record births and alternative sources should be consulted.

### 1852-1855 Birth Records

On January 12, 1852, the Pennsylvania Legislature enacted its first statewide law requiring the registration of vital records. As stated in the preamble, the law was prompted by a need to document births, deaths and marriages that could not be substantiated for legal cases, whereby "the rights of many have been sacrificed, and great wrongs done" as well as to validate "important truths, deeply affecting the physical welfare of mankind" that could be drawn from the recording of these records.[\[1\]](#) The law, however well intentioned, was short lived. The Registration Act of 1852 was repealed on January 31, 1855 [\[2\]](#), only 3 years after its inception. During those three years, only a few births, deaths and marriages were recorded within the county. This dearth of records may be an indication of a lack of compliance with the law, which may have lead to its eventual repeal.

The records in this index begin on July 1, 1852 and end in January 1855. They do not represent all of the births that took place in Chester County during this time period. There are several townships that never submitted any returns to the Register of Wills Office and a large majority only submitted a few. The closer the event took place to West Chester, the higher probability it was recorded.

The 1852-1855 birth records contain detailed information, including the maiden name of the mother and names of any other children born previously.

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### Birth Records, 1893-1907

Between 1893 and 1907, information on births was compiled by local tax assessors and then turned in to the county. Often a birth was recorded six months to a year after the actual event. The records do not include maiden names of mothers. Records are incomplete; not every birth was recorded. The only record that exists is the register itself; there are no certificates on file.

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### Birth Records, Post-1906

Beginning in 1906, the state of Pennsylvania began keeping birth records. These records are available by mail.

Contact: [Pennsylvania Department of Health](#).

## **Alternative Sources**

### **Delayed Birth Records, 1897-1907**

A person whose birth was not recorded or who wished to correct a birth register entry could file a delayed birth record. These records began in 1941, but cover births for the 1893-1907 period (some are earlier). Married women are indexed under both maiden and married names.

The following information may be found in a delayed birth record:

- place and date of birth, including name of hospital;
- full name of applicant;
- sex;
- whether a twin or other plural birth;
- whether the birth was legitimate;
- color or race of parents;
- birthplaces of parents and their ages at birth of applicant;
- occupations of parents;
- occupation of applicant;
- residence of parents, if living and known;
- maiden name of mother;
- number of children of this mother, if known;
- number of children of this mother living at time of application, if known.

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### **Poorhouse Records, 1800-1910**

Births that occurred at the county home can be found in the admissions books (1800-1858) and steward's books (1821-1823, 1825-1829). Birth dates of children bound out by the directors of the poor (1800-1825) can also be found in admission books.

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### **Poor School Children, 1810-1842**

Before the establishment of public schools, poor children were educated at private schools at county expense. The records generally list the head of the household and the names and ages of the children. Children ages 5-12 were eligible for county-paid tuition; most were ages 6-11.

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## **Tavern License Petitions, 1887-1923**

Tavern and hotel keepers had to apply for a license every year. Beginning in 1887 applicants had to list their place of birth and, if not native-born, where and when they were naturalized.

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In addition to the material listed above, the Archives has other records that may be used to determine ages. Please ask a reference archivist for assistance.

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[1] "An Act To provide for a registration of marriages, births and deaths," Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, (1852).

[2] "An Act To repeal the Registration Act," Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, (1855).