Incorporation Dates

for

Pennsylvania Municipalities

by

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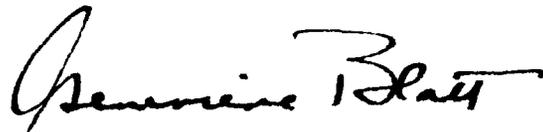Fred Hershey, Director

Department of Internal Affairs
Genevieve Blatt, Secretary

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Preface

Because of the interest shown in the list of incorporation dates for Pennsylvania municipalities which was compiled by Mrs. JoAnne Hottenstein, Research Assistant, and Mrs. Sibyl Welch, Research Clerk in the Bureau of Municipal Affairs, the Department of Internal Affairs is pleased to make the complete list available in published form.

It is recognized that there may be some disagreement about some of these dates. In many cases, local official records may contain dates which are more reliable or more well documented than those contained in the county or Commonwealth histories. This list is not in any sense an official list nor is it intended to dispute other sources. It is hoped, however, that it will be helpful for general informational purposes.

Genevieve Blatt
Secretary of Internal Affairs

Formation of Counties

Pennsylvania's 67 counties were formed between 1682 when William Penn divided the lands granted to him by King Charles II of England into the three original counties of Philadelphia, Bucks and Chester and 1878 when Lackawanna County, the youngest county, was created. The other 63 counties were formed by special or local acts. These acts were passed by the Provincial Assembly while Pennsylvania was a colony and by the General Assembly from 1775, when Pennsylvania became a Commonwealth, until 1874. Since the State Constitution of 1874 prohibited the passage of special or local legislation, Lackawanna County, the only remaining county to be created, was formed by decree of court under the authority of a general law (P. L. 17 of 1878).

Incorporation of Cities, Boroughs and Townships

Prior to 1874 cities were also chartered by special act. Philadelphia received its first city charter in 1691 and Pittsburgh was chartered as a city on March 18, 1816. The City of Scranton was chartered by an Act of April 23, 1866. On May 23, 1874 (P. L. 230) the first law was enacted dividing cities into three classes on the basis of population. This 1874 law also provided for the incorporation of third class cities by decree of the county Courts of Quarter Sessions and provided a system of government for third class cities. In 1927, the Legislature established another class of cities, that of second class A, and Scranton which had formerly been classified as a second class city along with Pittsburgh, became the only city of the second class A.

Boroughs and townships were also created by special act until the passage of such acts was prohibited. However, beginning in 1803 (Act of March 24, 4 Bioren's 72) the county Courts of Quarter Sessions were authorized to incorporate townships by petition of the inhabitants and in 1834 (Act of April 1, P. L. 163) the courts were given the authority to incorporate villages as boroughs upon petition of a majority of freeholders living in the village. Townships were not divided into two classes until April 28, 1899 (P. L. 104). Lower Merion Township in Montgomery County was the first township to use the act. In 1901, it became a first class township.

Reference Sources

The reference sources for this study consist for the most part of the various county and regional histories that have been written by Pennsylvania historians. The major reference source is a History of Pennsylvania written by Frederick A. Codcharles, entitled Pennsylvania, Political, Governmental, Military and Civil: Political and Civil History Volume. Where there is a discrepancy between a date given by a county history and Godcharles, it can generally be assumed that the latter source is the more correct. If you find, however, that an official local record differs with a date that is given in this study, it may be well to accept the local document as containing the most authoritative date.