



Finding A Pennsylvania Municipality's Official Incorporation Documents

There are times when a municipality may be asked to provide documentation of their incorporation, such as, when applying to grants from the federal government's System for Award Management (SAM) system. Documents related to a municipality's incorporation are considered permanent records according to the Pennsylvania Municipal Records Manual (see section AL-7) and should be kept safe, if extant. However, most municipalities may not have incorporation documents.

To validate a municipality's date of incorporation, SAM requires one of the following documents:

- Town charter
- Documentation from state governments for town existence
- Governor's declarations
- Formal resolution from town council establishing office

The Pennsylvania State Archives website has a page that lists incorporation dates and official names for all Pennsylvania municipalities:

<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/IncorporationDatesForMunicipalities/IncorporationDatesMap.htm>

A printout of a municipality's incorporation information from the State Archives website satisfies the "documentation from state government" requirement for SAM registration. If a municipality needs additional historical documentation of their incorporation the following information can be used to locate records.

Boroughs:

Most boroughs and cities established before 1874 were incorporated with an act of the Pennsylvania General Assembly. Most boroughs and cities incorporated via legislative act are listed in Calvin Beitel's "A Digest of Titles of Corporations Chartered by the Legislature of Pennsylvania, Between the Years 1700 and 1873 Inclusive" which is available online here:

https://www.google.com/books/edition/A_Digest_of_Titles_of_Corporations_Chart/Zr0ZAAAAYAAJ?q=&gbpv=0#f=false. If a municipality is listed in this book, use the citation to look up the original text of the legislative act in the "Laws of the General Assembly," also available online:

<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008892032>, or the Pennsylvania Statutes at Large (1810-present online here: <https://www.palrb.gov/Preservation>).

Boroughs established after 1874 were commonly done so through that county's Court of Quarter Sessions. Contact the Clerk of Courts of the county the municipality was located in when it was



incorporated (may not be the county the municipality is in today) and have them check for an entry in their dockets.

Townships:

Townships were typically established through their county Court of Quarter Sessions. Contact the Clerk of Courts of the county the municipality was located in when it was incorporated (may not be the county the municipality is in today) and have them check for an entry in their dockets. Do not expect to find an actual incorporation document; often times it was only officially noted with an entry in the docket and there was no separate record unless one was given to the municipality (this is uncommon).

Though unusual, some townships were incorporated through an act of legislation. In these cases search the “Laws of the General Assembly” (available online: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008892032>) for the year of the township’s incorporation for the particular act.

Other Information

In some instances municipal incorporation documents may also be found in a county's road dockets (either a separate document or as an entry in a docket book).

It was not a legal requirement in Pennsylvania to issue an incorporation document and in many cases a municipality’s charter document or any other official incorporation papers were never created.

For additional help locating official proof of a municipality’s incorporation, contact the Pennsylvania State Archives reference department by emailing ra-StateArchives@pa.gov or calling (717) 783-3281.