

History of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania



*The first Superior Court, as appointed in 1895.
L-R (seated): Edward N. Willard,
President Judge Charles E. Rice, John J. Wickham,
Henry J. McCarthy.
L-R (standing): James A. Beaver, George B. Orlady,
Howard J. Reeder.*

1895

The General Assembly created the Superior Court to further ease the workload of the state Supreme Court, giving each appellate court separate jurisdictions. The original Court consisted of seven judges appointed by the governor. The court hears its first arguments in November in the Supreme Court's courtroom at City Hall in Philadelphia.

1896

The Superior Court held its first special session, traveling to Erie to hear appeals from local counties.

1966

Judge Theodore O. Spaulding is appointed by Governor William Scranton as the first African American jurist in the Pennsylvania appellate courts. Judge Spaulding subsequently wins election for a full term on the Court.

1968

The Constitution of 1968 established the Commonwealth Court to reduce the workload of the Supreme and Superior Courts. The change reorganized the judiciary into the Unified Judicial System of Pennsylvania.

1978

The Supreme Court, citing the "exceedingly heavy volume of appeals coming to the Superior Court," exercised its constitutional supervisory powers over Pennsylvania courts to order the Superior Court to begin sitting in panels of three judges.

1979

Voters approved an amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution providing that the Superior Court be enlarged permanently.

1980

The legislature approved a decrease in the Supreme Court's mandated jurisdiction by expanding that of the Superior Court, and the General Assembly provided for the gubernatorial appointment of eight additional judges.

1981

Judge Phyllis Beck became the first woman to serve on the Superior Court when she was appointed by Governor Dick Thornburgh. Judge Beck subsequently wins elections to full terms on the Court.

1986

By this time, all 15 Superior Court judicial seats had been filled by election.

2012

The Supreme Court authorized the use of an electronic filing system for appellate courts, making it easier for attorneys and litigants to submit documents and access case information online.

For additional information on the Court's history, please visit The Historical Society of the Pennsylvania Superior Court website at <https://www.superiorcourthistory.org/>.