

RESEARCH GUIDE

Researching Your American Indian Ancestors on Ancestry

On the 2010 U.S. census, more than 3.6 million people reported having American Indian ancestry. American Indian research presents its own challenges and rewards as you establish your personal link to a proud, and often tragic, past.

The American Indian Collection on Ancestry

Ancestry is home to the largest online collection of records relating to American Indians, including a wide selection dealing with the Five Civilized Tribes: the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole. These groups lived throughout the southeastern United States, but during the 19th century, most were forced to move to Indian Territory, in present-day Oklahoma. Their history has been among the best documented of any group of American Indian tribes.



STRATEGY FOR NATIVE AMERICAN RESEARCH

Do you know, or think, you have an American Indian ancestor? Researching your Native American ancestry does have a few unique aspects of its own, such as the importance of tribal affiliation and the forced removal of entire nations. So we suggest a three-step approach. If you are researching based on tradition passed down in your family, your search starts with step one. If you come across someone in your research who appears to be an American Indian, you may be ready for step two.

Step One: Start at Home

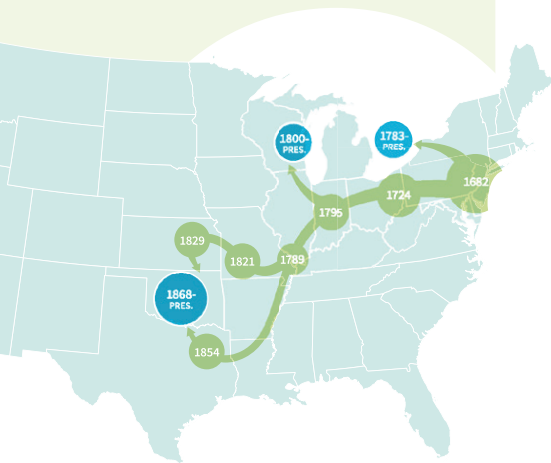
Your search for your American Indian ancestors begins the same as any other: at home. Gather information and documents you already have available; talk to family; make notes of names, dates, places, tribal affiliations, and other details you have heard or that people remember. Don't forget to interview older members of your family to glean all you can from oral traditions.

Pay particular attention to any clues about your ancestor's possible tribe. Work your way back through the generations methodically, documenting connections as you work toward your American Indian ancestor.



Tribes on the Move:

If you have Delaware (Lenape) ancestry, your ancestors were living in the Delaware Valley when European colonists first began to settle the area. By 1750, they had been pushed westward, and most were living in Ohio. Treaties in 1795 and 1818 surrendered most of those lands, and the Delaware moved to Indiana and Missouri. By 1872, most were in Oklahoma.



Step Two: Research the Tribe

Because American Indian records are most often tied to tribes, determining which tribe your ancestor belonged to and learning something about that tribe is a vital step in American Indian research.

Geography and chronology are two keys. Tribes lived in very different places at different times, so learning where a tribe was at a certain time can help you locate records or determine which tribe your ancestor may have belonged to—or not. For example, you could use the 1900 U.S. census to determine if a family member was living in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma).

Search the Internet for tribal histories and maps that show former and current tribe and reservation locations. [The Native American History and Genealogy](#) section of the Access Genealogy website is an excellent resource for both general and tribal history.

Consider groups and nations that interacted with tribes—French trappers, Spanish missionaries, British colonists. These were often the people who created the records. Also be on the lookout for aspects of tribal society—such as naming patterns, marriage customs, or whether a society was matrilineal—that might help your research.

Step Three: Look for Individuals

Once you have a tribe and a place, you're ready to focus your search on your ancestors. Start with the [American Indian Collection](#) on Ancestry.com.

As you look for records, ask yourself this question: Where would this person's life have intersected with the government or some other public institution? These are the points when records were often created. They include censuses, tribal enrollments, land transactions, Indian schools, and others. Don't forget websites—many tribes now have their own websites, and other records and research helps may be available online.

You can find a detailed introduction to Native American research in chapter 19 of *The Source: A Guidebook to American Genealogy*. It is available on the [Ancestry.com Wiki](#) and includes sections on general research guidelines, tribal research, where to look for records, and more.

Residence:		Creek NATION. Indian ROLL.		Card No. 1404								
Post Office: Noldsville Ind. Ter.				Field No. 1404								
Order Roll No.	NAME	Relation to Person Named	AGE	SEX	BLOOD	Year	TRIBAL ENROLLMENT No.	Name of Father	Year	TRIBAL ENROLLMENT OF PARENTS	Name of Mother	Year
4473	Stewart, Robert W.		32	M	1/2	1890	Little R. Julia	Robert W. Stewart	1888	Adopted Ojibwa	Sophia McSwain	1888
4476	Dancy, Dancy	Wife	27	F	1/2	1890	Duckabatchee	Norus Yabala	1888	Duckabatchee	Lilka Scott	1890
4477	Narcomen, Daniel	Wife	9	M	1/2	1895	Little R. Julia	Co-ge-gee	1888	Seminole	Lizzy Chupera	1888

Creek enrollment record.



Why Can't I Find My American Indian Ancestor?

- American Indian tribes did not keep written records before contact with Europeans.
- Not all Indians were members of or affiliated with a recognized tribe and so may not appear in tribal records.
- Some Indians escaped persecution by concealing or denying their ethnic heritage. Others married into the white culture many generations back.
- Some tribes or bands were at times ignored by Indian agents/superintendents because of distance from their offices, and fewer records were created.
- Tribes fell under the jurisdiction of different agencies over the years, so their records could be in a variety of places.
- Many people did not enroll out of fear of the government.
- In most cases, the Dawes Commission used a matriarchal system (based on the mother's tribe). For example, if one's mother was a Chickasaw and the father was a Cherokee, the person would be listed as a Chickasaw.
- While federal and state governments had guidelines about enumerating Indians on census records, they often weren't included, though an Indian spouse of a white man or woman may be.
- Some Indians were listed erroneously on records as white, black, or mulatto, depending on skin color.



Naming

- Two basic types of names were often given by a tribe: personal names and honorary names.
- The personal name can change at different times: entry into adolescence, a hunting kill, war expedition, some notable feat, or the attainment of chieftainship. Tracking these name changes in the records is almost impossible
- Europeans often gave a third, Anglo name.
- Kinship terms have varying meanings: for example, “father” does not always denote the natural parent.
- Most tribes are organized along matriarchal rather than patriarchal lines, with lines of descent and property being passed down through the mother's line.



RECORDS FOR RESEARCHING AMERICAN INDIAN ANCESTRY

American Indians appear in both general and Indian-specific records. Knowing when and in which records your ancestors' names may appear will help focus your research and increase your chances of success.

U.S. Census Records

Do American Indians appear in U.S. census records? The answer is yes and no. It depends on when you are looking, where they lived, and what their relationship was with their tribe and the U.S. government.



U.S. Federal Census Population Schedules

39	39	Ger. ni-mo 3-1	Head	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico
		Zi-yeh 3-3	Wife	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico
		Eva 12-11	Daughter	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico

Geronimo with wife Zi-yeh and daughter Eva on the 1900 U.S. Federal Census, Fort Sill, Oklahoma Territory.

American Indians are not identified as such on the 1790–1840 censuses. Remember, too, that this was a time of U.S. territorial expansion, and some Indian lands fell outside of the territorial U.S. A few American Indians living among the general population were identified as “Indians” beginning in the 1850 census, and in 1860, census enumerators were instructed that “Indians not taxed are not to be enumerated. The families of Indians who have renounced tribal rule, and who under state or territory laws exercise the rights of citizens, are to be enumerated.” (Indians “not taxed” included those on reservations and those living as nomads in unsettled areas.) Starting in 1900, Indians on reservations and in the general population were enumerated on the census.

The first census in Indian Territory (Oklahoma) was taken in 1860, though it included no Indians. No census was taken there in 1870 or 1880. The 1900 and 1910 censuses included extra questions under a Special Inquiries Relating to Indians section.

24	25	26	Lone-let-twa	Wife	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico
25			Sikais-mina	Wife	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico
26			Ben	Wife	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico
27	36	27	Mok-wi	Wife	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico
28			Hwan-wi	Wife	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico
29	27	28	Tal-wi	Wife	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico
30			Tuy-sun-wi	Wife	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico
31			Wan Taylor	Wife	2	18	1864	Mo	Moico

1910 U.S. Federal Census with Special Inquiries Relation to Indians.

When looking for American Indians in census records, remember to search for both Indian and Anglicized names when applicable.

All publicly available U.S. censuses are in the [U.S. Federal Census Collection on Ancestry](#). For more details, consult NARA's [American Indians in the Federal Decennial Census, 1790–1930](#), page.



NO.	INDIAN NAME	ENGLISH NAME	SEX	RELATION	AGE
23	69. Amitté Ahove	Old Grove Head	Male	Husband	75
	70. Meas Sotah	Stacia Plenty Woman	F	Wife	65
	71. Ahindie	Rider	M	Brother	58
24	72. Ahie Kalmahah	Smok Run on Top	M	Husband	28
	73. Ahie Ahaja	Flat Smok	F	Wife	28
	74. Ahie Ahaja	Old Ahie Ahaja	M	Son	1
	75. Ewanawitta Ahove	Plenty Ahove	F	Brother	31
	76. Mahave	Frank	F	Sister	22
25	77. Ahie Ahie	Pointe Ahie Ahie	M	Husband	33
	78. Ahie Ahie	Pointe Ahie Ahie	F	Wife	35
	79. Ahie Ahie	Pointe Ahie Ahie	F	Mother	68
	80. Ahie Ahie	Three Wolves	M	Sister	39
26	81. Ahie Ahie	White Iron River Ahie	M	Husband	56
	82. Ahie Ahie	Pointe Ahie Ahie	F	Wife	22
	83. Ahie Ahie	White Iron River Ahie	F	Sister	4

Crow Indian census roll from Montana, 1891.

U.S. Indian Census Rolls

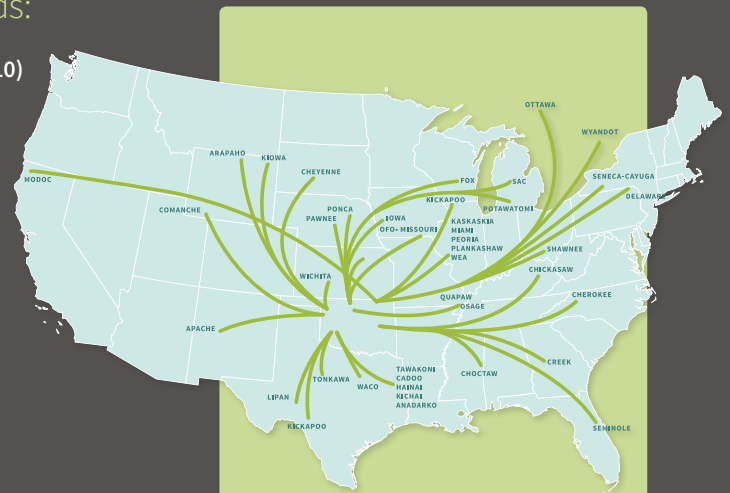
A July 4, 1884, act of Congress required Department of Indian Affairs agents or superintendents in charge of reservations to submit a yearly census of Indians under their jurisdiction. These began in 1885 and were required up until 1940, though you will not find a census for every reservation for every year. Also, only people who maintained formal ties with a tribe under federal supervision (such as those living on reservations) appear on these rolls.

There are more than 560 federally recognized tribes in the United States, and these rolls make up one of the most extensive and valuable collections of American Indian records for this time period.

The [U.S. Indian Census Rolls, 1885–1940](#), are available on Ancestry. For more background on these records, consult NARA’s [Indian Census Rolls](#) page.

Questions varied by year, but here are some of the details you can find in U.S. census records:

- | | |
|---|---|
| name | Special Schedules (1900 & 1910) |
| race | other name |
| birth date/age | tribe |
| birthplace | tribe of mother |
| parents’ birthplaces | tribe of father |
| number of years married | mixed blood |
| mother of how many children/
how many living | marital status |
| occupation | dwelling |
| education | graduated from what
educational institution (1910) |
| citizenship | year of allotment (1910) |



American Indian tribes resettled in Oklahoma. (From map originally created by the Division of Indian Health, U.S. Public Health Service.)





Enrollment records typically contain:

- Name of tribe and date of validity
- Roll number (unique number assigned to each individual)
- Name (including given name, birth name, and married name)
- Date of death (if applicable)
- Probate number (if applicable)
- Blood degree
- Names of both parents
- Blood degree of both parents



ENROLLMENT RECORDS

From time to time, the government tried to create an authoritative list of members of a tribe so they could deal with members of that tribe in an official way. This process was called “enrollment.” Today, tribes are responsible for their own enrollment policies and procedures, but government enrollment records can be another useful source for researching American Indian ancestry because they can provide names, dates, places, tribal affiliations, and family relationships.

Dawes Commission Records

The General Allotment Act, or Dawes Act, of 1887 included a plan to parcel out formerly communal tribal lands and allot them to individual tribal members. In 1893, the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes, chaired by Henry Dawes, was established to convince the leaders of the Civilized Tribes to accept allotment. The Dawes Commission began accepting applications for tribal citizenship, or enrollment, in 1896, though this initial enrollment was annulled and the process started again in 1898. In 1907 the tribal membership rolls were finalized. However, under a 1914 act, an additional 312 individuals were enrolled.

RESIDENCE: Sasakwa TOWN: _____ SEMINOLE NATION. SEMINOLE ROLL. CARD NO. 437
 POST OFFICE: _____ FIELD NO. 437

Sheet Roll No.	NAME	Relation to Applicant	AGE	SEX	BLOOD	TRIBAL ENROLLMENT		TRIBAL ENROLLMENT OF PARENTS				
						Year	BAND	Name of Father	Year	BAND	Name of Mother	Year
11662-1	<u>Senes</u>		<u>40</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>full</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>Senes</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Senes</u>	<u>Senes</u>	<u>1898</u>	<u>Senes</u>
11662-2	<u>Senes</u>		<u>25</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>full</u>			<u>Senes</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Senes</u>	<u>1898</u>	<u>Senes</u>
11662-3	<u>Senes</u>		<u>18</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>full</u>			<u>Senes</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Senes</u>	<u>1898</u>	<u>Senes</u>
11662-4	<u>Senes</u>		<u>8</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>full</u>			<u>Senes</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Senes</u>	<u>1898</u>	<u>Senes</u>

Enrollment record.

More than 300,000 applications for enrollment were received, and nearly two-thirds of them were denied. If approved, the applicant qualified to receive 160 acres for farming, 80 acres for raising cattle, 40 acres to live on, or a cash payment.

Records related to the Dawes Commission include [applications](#), [records related to the invalidated early roll](#), [land allotments](#), and [enrollment cards](#). Application packets vary in size and scope but typically include an affidavit from the applicant and supporting documentation that proved his or her eligibility for tribal membership. You can learn more about the Dawes records on NARA's [Dawes Records](#) pages.

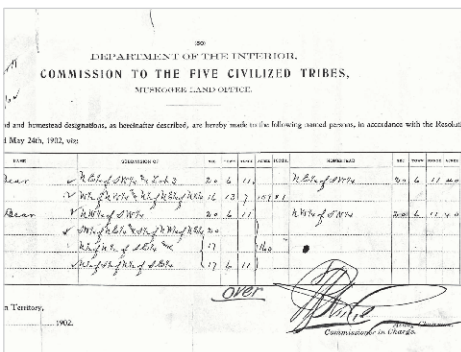


Other Enrollment Records Related to the Five Civilized Tribes

Two other sets of enrollment records important to Cherokee research are the Guion Miller Roll and the Baker Roll records. Both relate to the Eastern Band of North Carolina Cherokee. These were Cherokee who avoided removal to the west.

In 1906, the U.S. Court of Claims appointed Guion Miller from the Interior Department to determine who was eligible for funds under treaties of 1835-36 and 1845 between the United States and the Eastern Cherokee. [Records include](#) an estimated 90,000 individual applicants from throughout North America.

The [Baker Roll](#) was the final roll compiled for determining membership in the Eastern Band. Along with the roll itself are applications for tribal membership, correspondence, transcripts of testimony, and copies of decisions and findings by the Enrolling Commission.



Land allotment.

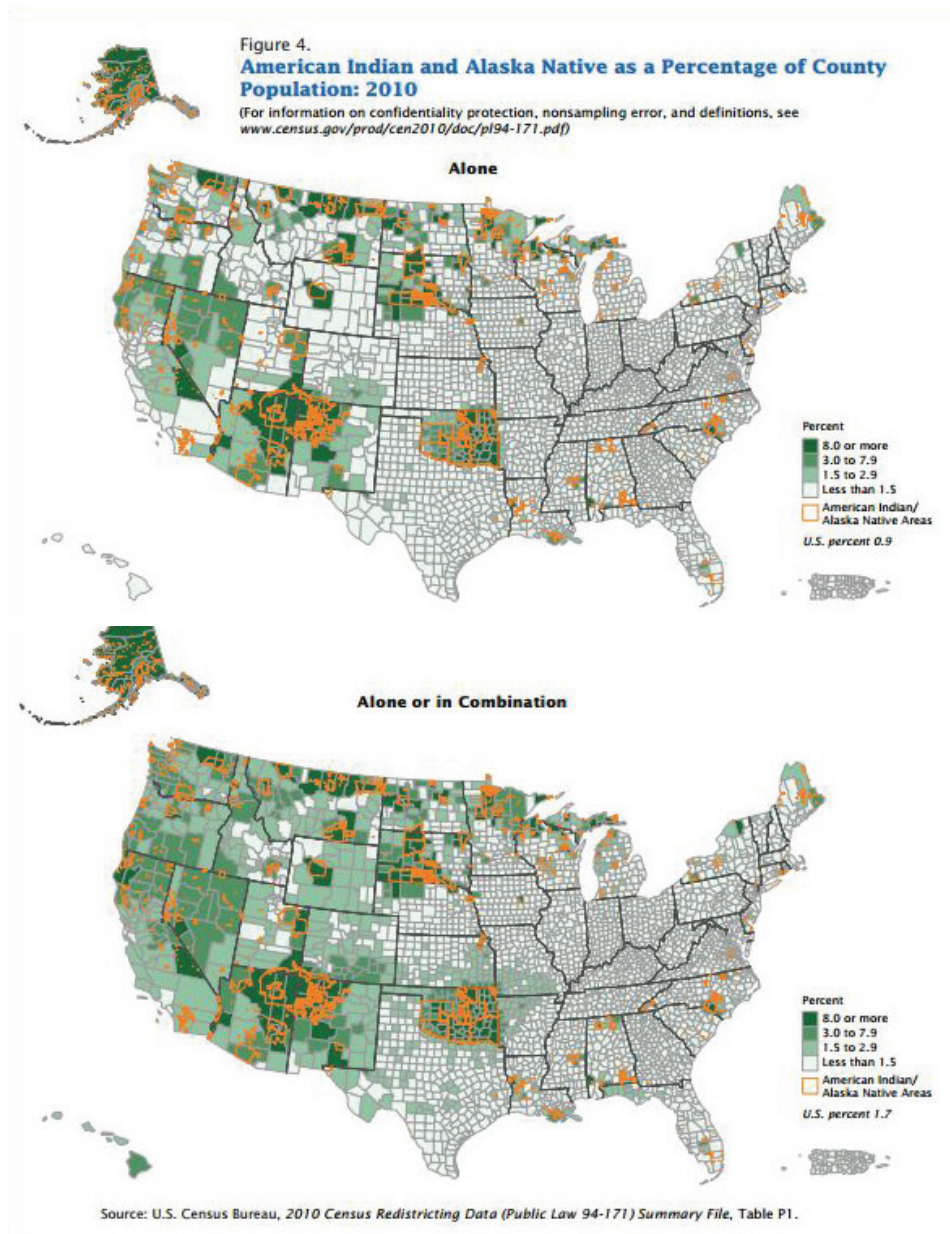
Land Allotments

One of the outcomes of the Dawes Commission was the allotment of land to approved individuals, including minor children. Records can include names, family relationships, tribal affiliations, descriptions of land, and other details. You'll find [Oklahoma, Land Allotments for Five Civilized Tribes, 1884-1934](#), on Ancestry.

Other Records

Don't stop your search at census and enrollment records. Below are some other record types that may mention your American Indian ancestors. Some of them you can find at various National Archives research facilities. Others may be found at a state or local level:

- Indian removal records
- [Indian school records](#)
- will and probate records
- land claims
- church records
- vital records (primarily 20th century)
- [Bureau of Indian Affairs Records](#)
- [military records](#)
- [employment records](#)



DNA

AncestryDNA is one of the newest tools available to explore your American Indian heritage. AncestryDNA is an autosomal DNA test that looks across the entire spectrum of your family tree, on both the maternal and paternal side. DNA test results will not identify a relationship to a particular tribe, but they can help you detect Native American ancestry in your family's past. You can learn more about [AncestryDNA here](#).