

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

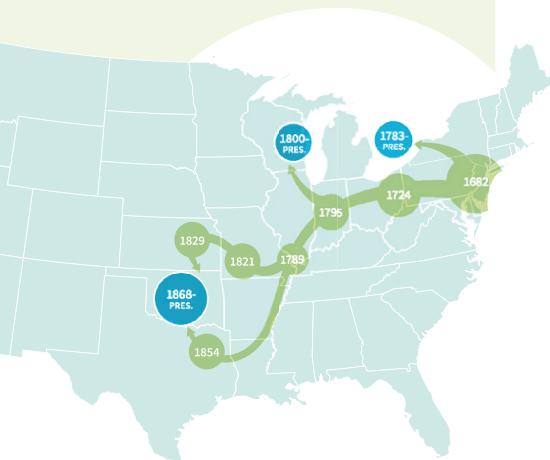
Your search for your American Indian ancestors begins the same as any other: at home. Gather information and documents you already have available; talk to family; make notes of names, dates, places, tribal affiliations, and other details you have heard or that people remember. Don't forget to interview 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: Noldenville Ind. Ter.									Field No. 1408		
Order Roll No.	NAME	Relationship to Person Enrolled	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. Duba	Robert W. Stewart	1890	Adapted Ojibwa	1890
4476	Duffy, Lucy	Wife	27	F	7/8	1890	Ojibwa	Lucas Yabala	1890	Little R. Duba	1890
4477	Parsonson, Daniel	son	9	M	1/2	1895	Little R. Duba	Co-gl-gue	1895	Seminole	1895

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	Gen. nima ³⁻¹	Head	h 8	10-10 1/2	40	Meico
	Gromme ³	Wife	h 5	10-10 1/2	21	Poronia
	Gromme ³	Daughter	h 5	10-10 1/2		Stabonne

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.

[illegible]

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.



CENSUS of the *Crow* Agency, *Montana*
by *Dr. R. W. Wagner*, United States Indian Agent,
August, 1891

NO.	INDIAN NAME	ENGLISH NAME	SEX	RELATION	AGE
93	69. <i>Benito Ahove</i>	<i>Old Benito Ahove</i>	Male	Head	75
	70. <i>Mesa Boteho</i>	<i>Benito Ahove's woman</i>	F	Wife	65
	71. <i>Akintie</i>	<i>Rider</i>	M	Brother	25
25	72. <i>Alta Kalmash</i>	<i>Smth Rinn on top</i>	M	Head	28
	73. <i>Geo. Hapra</i>	<i>Flat back</i>	F	Wife	28
	74. <i>Old Ahove</i>	<i>Old Ahove</i>	M	Son	1
	75. <i>Esangarvita Ahove</i>	<i>Plenty Ahove</i>	F	Daughter	31
	76. <i>Mahava</i>	<i>French</i>	F	Sister	22
25	77. <i>Siwapa Ahove</i>	<i>Beats the high</i>	M	Head	33
	78. <i>Alpato Ahove</i>	<i>Beats in a hand</i>	F	Wife	35
	79. <i>Alta Ahove</i>	<i>Beats the Ahove</i>	F	Wife	68
	80. <i>Alta Ahove</i>	<i>Three Ahove</i>	M	Son	39
26	81. <i>Mistahvita Ahove</i>	<i>Beats the Ahove</i>	M	Head	36
	82. <i>Escheta</i>	<i>Woman</i>	F	Wife	22
	83. <i>Alta Ahove</i>	<i>Beats the Ahove</i>	M	Son	39

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.

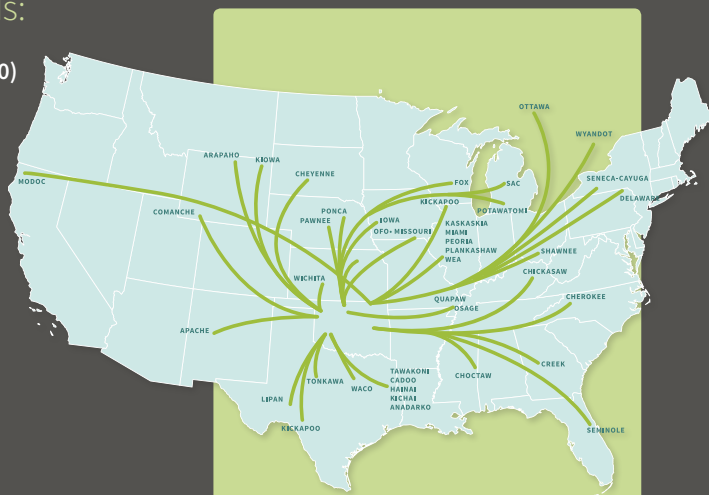
The [U.S. Indian Census Rolls, 1885–1940](#), are available on Ancestry. For more background on these records, consult NARA's [Indian Census Rolls](#) page.

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

name
race
birth date/age
birthplace
parents' birthplaces
number of years married
mother of how many children/
how many living
occupation
education
citizenship

Special Schedules (1900 & 1910)

other name
tribe
tribe of mother
tribe of father
mixed blood
marital status
dwelling
graduated from what
educational institution (1910)
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: Seminole TOWN: Seminole **Seminole Nation. Seminole Roll.** CARD NO. 437
 POST OFFICE: Seminole (for including Provisions)

Dawes Roll No.	NAME	Relation to Person Named	AGE	SEX	BLOOD	TRIBAL ENROLLMENT		TRIBAL ENROLLMENT OF PARENTS					
						Year	BAND	Name of Father	Year	BAND	Name of Mother	Year	BAND
1862-1	Sense		40	M	full	1897	Coke Seminoe	18	Distinook Hargo	1898	Coke Seminoe	18	Coke Seminoe
1862-2	Amos		38	M	full	1897	Coke Seminoe	18	Distinook Hargo	1898	Coke Seminoe	18	Coke Seminoe
1862-3	Sarney		18	M	full	1897	Coke Seminoe	18	Distinook Hargo	1898	Coke Seminoe	18	Coke Seminoe
1862-4	Santury		8	M	full	1897	Coke Seminoe	18	Distinook Hargo	1898	Coke Seminoe	18	Coke Seminoe
5													
6													
7													
8													

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.

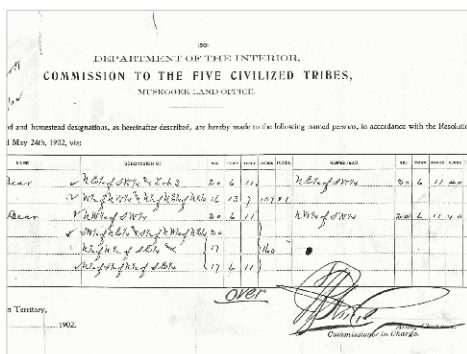


Other Enrollment Records Related to the Five Civilized Tribes

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.

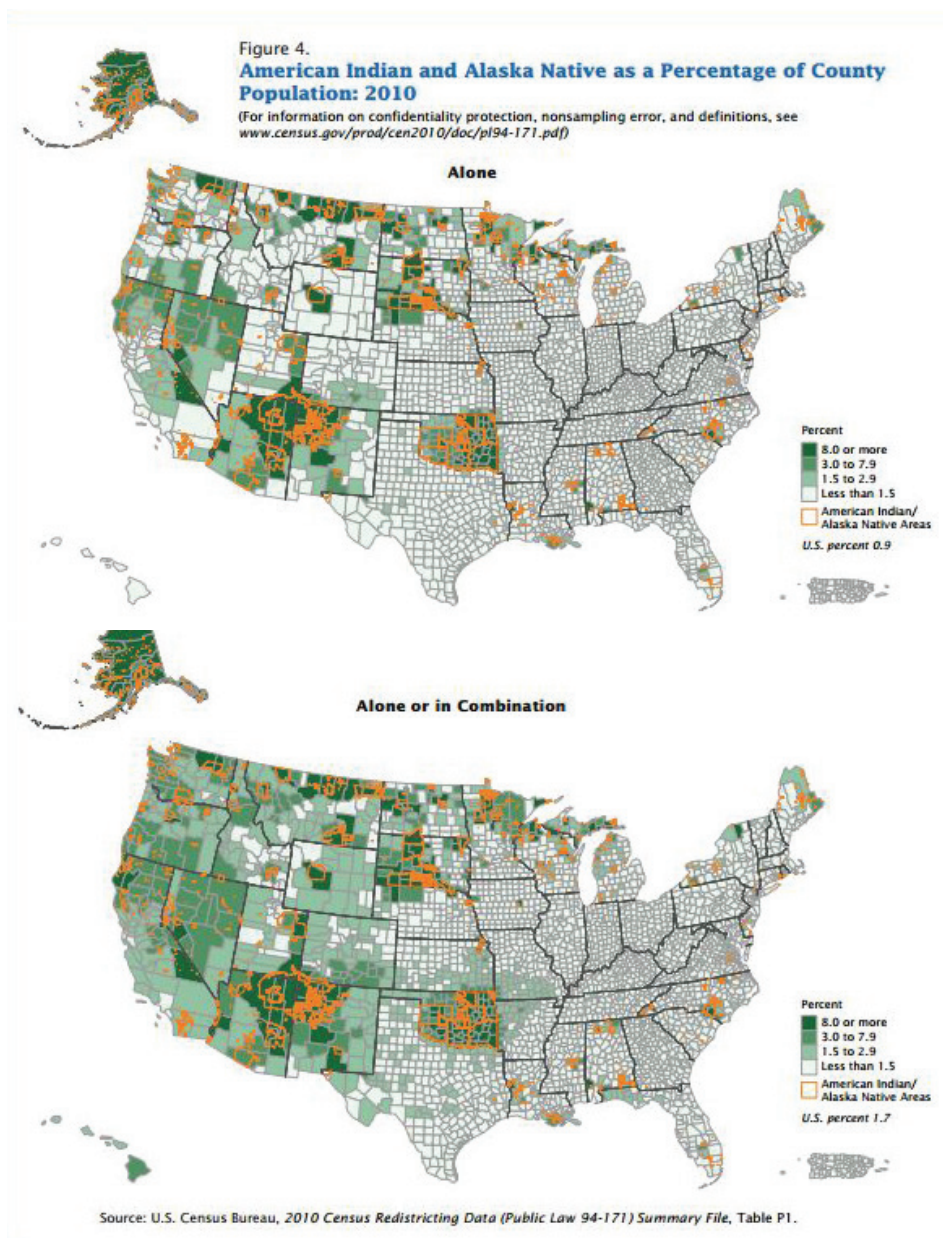
Land Allotments

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](#).