

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

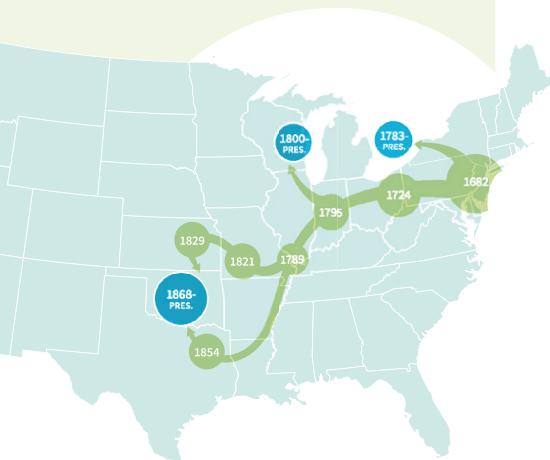
Your search for your American Indian ancestors begins the same as any other: at home. Gather information and documents you already have available; talk to family; make notes of names, dates, places, tribal affiliations, and other details you have heard or that people remember. Don't forget to interview 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. Tex.									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	Wife	27	F	7/8	1890	Oskabatchee	Norma 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 ^{Mr} 3-1	Head	h 8	10-10 1/2	40	Meico
	Gronimo ^{Mr} 3	Wife	h 5	10-10 1/2	21	Bosonia
	Gronimo ^{Mr} 3	Daughter	h 5	10-10 1/2		Stabona

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.

25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150	151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165	166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180	181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200	201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220	221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240	241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250	251	252	253	254	255	256	257	258	259	260	261	262	263	264	265	266	267	268	269	270	271	272	273	274	275	276	277	278	279	280	281	282	283	284	285	286	287	288	289	290	291	292	293	294	295	296	297	298	299	300	301	302	303	304	305	306	307	308	309	310	311	312	313	314	315	316	317	318	319	320	321	322	323	324	325	326	327	328	329	330	331	332	333	334	335	336	337	338	339	340	341	342	343	344	345	346	347	348	349	350	351	352	353	354	355	356	357	358	359	360	361	362	363	364	365	366	367	368	369	370	371	372	373	374	375	376	377	378	379	380	381	382	383	384	385	386	387	388	389	390	391	392	393	394	395	396	397	398	399	400	401	402	403	404	405	406	407	408	409	410	411	412	413	414	415	416	417	418	419	420	421	422	423	424	425	426	427	428	429	430	431	432	433	434	435	436	437	438	439	440	441	442	443	444	445	446	447	448	449	450	451	452	453	454	455	456	457	458	459	460	461	462	463	464	465	466	467	468	469	470	471	472	473	474	475	476	477	478	479	480	481	482	483	484	485	486	487	488	489	490	491	492	493	494	495	496	497	498	499	500	501	502	503	504	505	506	507	508	509	510	511	512	513	514	515	516	517	518	519	520	521	522	523	524	525	526	527	528	529	530	531	532	533	534	535	536	537	538	539	540	541	542	543	544	545	546	547	548	549	550	551	552	553	554	555	556	557	558	559	560	561	562	563	564	565	566	567	568	569	570	571	572	573	574	575	576	577	578	579	580	581	582	583	584	585	586	587	588	589	590	591	592	593	594	595	596	597	598	599	600	601	602	603	604	605	606	607	608	609	610	611	612	613	614	615	616	617	618	619	620	621	622	623	624	625	626	627	628	629	630	631	632	633	634	635	636	637	638	639	640	641	642	643	644	645	646	647	648	649	650	651	652	653	654	655	656	657	658	659	660	661	662	663	664	665	666	667	668	669	670	671	672	673	674	675	676	677	678	679	680	681	682	683	684	685	686	687	688	689	690	691	692	693	694	695	696	697	698	699	700	701	702	703	704	705	706	707	708	709	710	711	712	713	714	715	716	717	718	719	720	721	722	723	724	725	726	727	728	729	730	731	732	733	734	735	736	737	738	739	740	741	742	743	744	745	746	747	748	749	750	751	752	753	754	755	756	757	758	759	760	761	762	763	764	765	766	767	768	769	770	771	772	773	774	775	776	777	778	779	780	781	782	783	784	785	786	787	788	789	790	791	792	793	794	795	796	797	798	799	800	801	802	803	804	805	806	807	808	809	810	811	812	813	814	815	816	817	818	819	820	821	822	823	824	825	826	827	828	829	830	831	832	833	834	835	836	837	838	839	840	841	842	843	844	845	846	847	848	849	850	851	852	853	854	855	856	857	858	859	860	861	862	863	864	865	866	867	868	869	870	871	872	873	874	875	876	877	878	879	880	881	882	883	884	885	886	887	888	889	890	891	892	893	894	895	896	897	898	899	900	901	902	903	904	905	906	907	908	909	910	911	912	913	914	915	916	917	918	919	920	921	922	923	924	925	926	927	928	929	930	931	932	933	934	935	936	937	938	939	940	941	942	943	944	945	946	947	948	949	950	951	952	953	954	955	956	957	958	959	960	961	962	963	964	965	966	967	968	969	970	971	972	973	974	975	976	977	978	979	980	981	982	983	984	985	986	987	988	989	990	991	992	993	994	995	996	997	998	999	1000
25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109	110	111	112	113	114	115	116	117	118	119	120	121	122	123	124	125	126	127	128	129	130	131	132	133	134	135	136	137	138	139	140	141	142	143	144	145	146	147	148	149	150	151	152	153	154	155	156	157	158	159	160	161	162	163	164	165	166	167	168	169	170	171	172	173	174	175	176	177	178	179	180	181	182	183	184	185	186	187	188	189	190	191	192	193	194	195	196	197	198	199	200	201	202	203	204	205	206	207	208	209	210	211	212	213	214	215	216	217	218	219	220	221	222	223	224	225	226	227	228	229	230	231	232	233	234	235	236	237	238	239	240	241	242	243	244	245	246	247	248	249	250	251	252	253	254	255	256	257	258	259	260	261	262	263	264	265	266	267	268	269	270	271	272	273	274	275	276	277	278	279	280	281	282	283	284	285	286	287	288	289	290	291	292	293	294	295	296	297	298	299	300	301	302	303	304	305	306	307	308	309	310	311	312	313	314	315	316	317	318	319	320	321	322	323	324	325	326	327	328	329	330	331	332	333	334	335	336	337	338	339	340	341	342	343	344	345	346	347	348	349	350	351	352	353	354	355	356	357	358	359	360	361	362	363	364	365	366	367	368	369	370	371	372	373	374	375	376	377	378	379	380	381	382	383	384	385	386	387	388	389	390	391	392	393	394	395	396	397	398	399	400	401	402	403	404	405	406	407	408	409	410	411	412	413	414	415	416	417	418	419	420	421	422	423	424	425	426	427	428	429	430	431	432	433	434	435	436	437	438	439	440	441	442	443	444	445	446	447	448	449	450	451	452	453	454	455	456	457	458	459	460	461	462	463	464	465	466	467	468	469	470	471	472	473	474	475	476	477	478	479	480	481	482	483	484	485	486	487	488	489	490	491	492	493	494	495	496	497	498	499	500	501	502	503	504	505	506	507	508	509	510	511	512	513	514	515	516	517	518	519	520	521	522	523	524	525	526	527	528	529	530	531	532	533	534	535	536	537	538	539	540	541	542	543	544	545	546	547	548	549	550	551	552	553	554	555	556	557	558	559	560	561	562	563	564	565	566	567	568	569	570	571	572	573	574	575	576	577	578	579	580	581	582	583	584	585	586	587	588	589	590	591	592	593	594	595	596	597	598	599	600	601	602	603	604	605	606	607	608	609	610	611	612	613	614																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																																		

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		(18-1884)	Indians of	
by		Special Agent	taken	
by		Special Agent	United States Indian Agent,	
No.	INDIAN NAME	ENGLISH NAME	SEX.	AGE.
23	69 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Old <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	24
	70 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	25
	71 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	26
24	72 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	27
	73 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	28
	74 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	29
	75 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	30
	76 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	31
	77 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	32
25	78 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	33
	79 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	34
	80 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	35
26	81 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	36
	82 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	37
	83 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	38
	84 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	39
	85 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	40
	86 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	41
	87 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	42
	88 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	43
	89 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Female	44
	90 <i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	<i>Amos</i> <i>Shore</i>	Male	45

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.

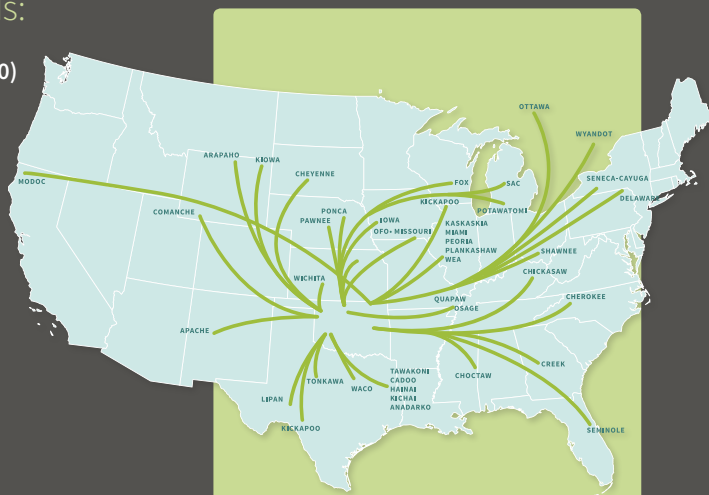
The [U.S. Indian Census Rolls, 1885–1940](#), are available on Ancestry. For more background on these records, consult NARA’s [Indian Census Rolls](#) page.

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	<u>Sense</u>		<u>40</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>full</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>Coke Seminoe</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Indian</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>Coke Seminoe</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Indian</u>
1862-2	<u>Anna</u>		<u>38</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>full</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>Coke Seminoe</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Indian</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>Coke Seminoe</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Indian</u>
1862-3	<u>Sarvey</u>		<u>18</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>full</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>Coke Seminoe</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Indian</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>Coke Seminoe</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Indian</u>
1862-4	<u>Santury</u>		<u>8</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>full</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>Coke Seminoe</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Indian</u>	<u>1897</u>	<u>Coke Seminoe</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Indian</u>
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.

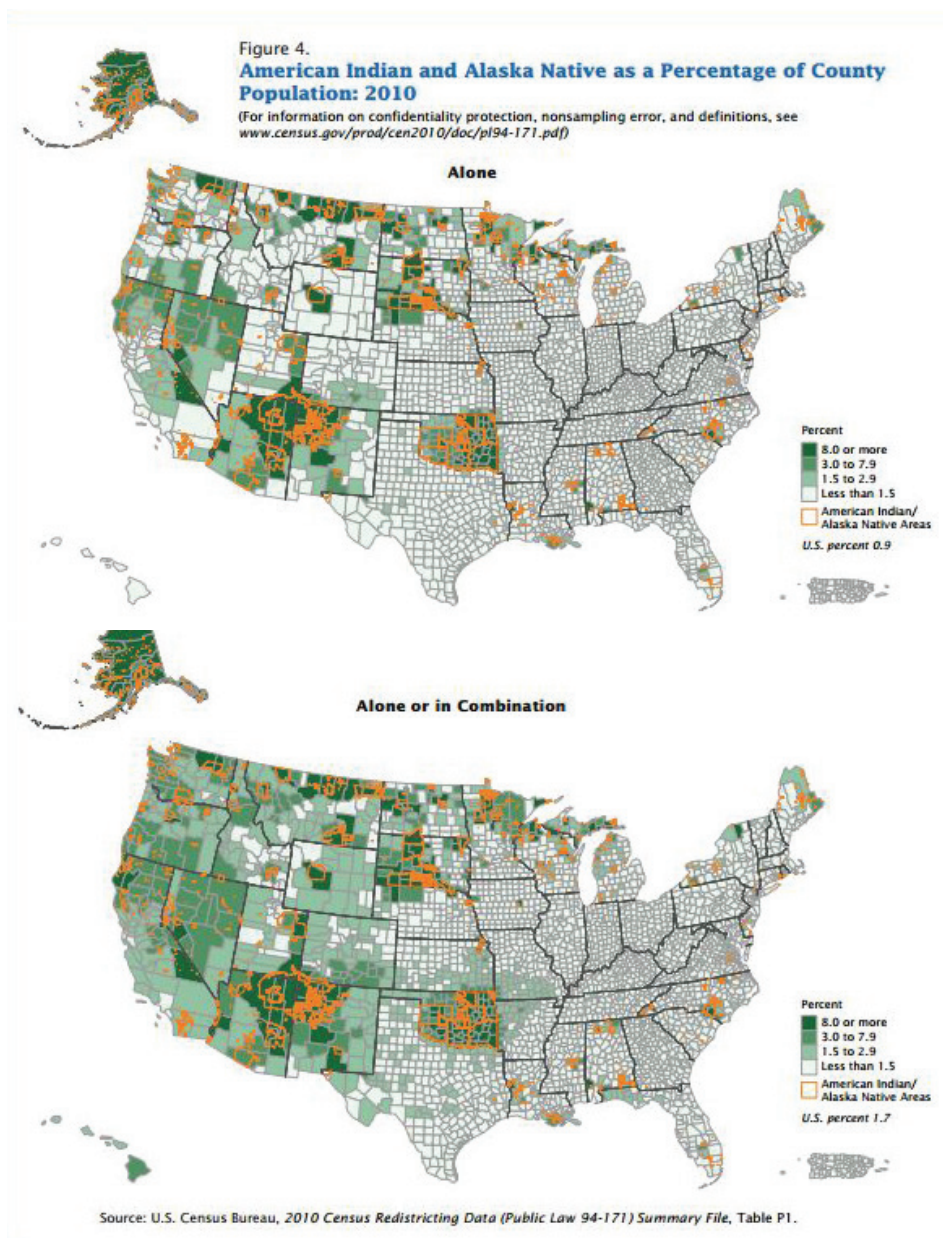
Land Allotments

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](#).