

RESEARCHING YOUR NATIVE AMERICAN ANCESTRY

Barbara LaClair, November 2022

BASIC METHODS THE SAME AS FOR ANY ANCESTOR:

- Start with what you know, and work backward, one step at a time
- Check for documents at home
- Ask family members what they know, what documents they have
- Begin to search other records and source materials (online AND offline)
- All the usual genealogical resources still apply: census, vital records, probate, deeds, etc.

THE KEY TO NATIVE AMERICAN RESEARCH IS TO KNOW THE TRIBE!

IF YOUR ANCESTOR MAINTAINED CLOSE TIES TO HIS/HER TRIBE, YOUR RESEARCH WILL BE EASIER. IF NOT, TRIBAL AFFILIATION IS THE FIRST QUESTION THAT MUST BE ANSWERED.

IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE TRIBE:

Study the history and context for the location and time period where your "Indian" ancestor lived.

- What tribes resided in the vicinity?
- What opportunities for interaction?

Narrow the list of likely tribes, and then begin to look at their resource materials

Look at ALL records pertaining to the ancestor of interest, and look for any suggestion of Native American race, or affiliation with others of Native American heritage (*note: documentation of race is often not reliable, but search anyway*)

Good Resource to learn about tribes by location: <http://www.native-languages.org/states.htm>

NATIVE AMERICANS IN U.S CENSUS POPULATION SCHEDULES

For Indians residing on Reservations or with their tribes:

- [1900 Census](#)
The 1900 census includes a separate **Indian Population Schedule** by county. The 1900 census included the individual's Indian and English name, asking tribe of this Indian, tribe of his father, and tribe of his mother, percent of Indian blood in the individual and the parents, education, and land allotment information.
- [1910 Census](#)
The 1910 census has a section called "**Special Inquiries Related to Indians**" asking tribe of this

Indian, tribe of his father, tribe of his mother, percent of Indian and other blood. Also asks education, land allotment, and marriage information.

- **1950 Census**

Census of Indians living on reservations (not conducted on every reservation). Asked about other names used, tribal affiliation, clan, degree of blood, languages spoken, participation in Native American ceremonies

For Indians not residing on reservations with their tribes, they should be recorded in general Census Population Schedules, but race may not be reliably recorded.

SOURCES AND RESOURCES UNIQUE TO NATIVE AMERICAN RESEARCH:

- Tribal rolls and censuses (1887 – 1940s) – should include all enrolled tribal members, even if not living on the reservation
- DAWES Application packets (Five Civilized Tribes – Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Chickasaw, Seminole) – family interviews contain rich genealogical information. Rejected applications just as valuable as those who were approved.
- Vital records recorded by the Agency – Births, Deaths, Marriages
- Special tribal surveys – Industrial Surveys 1922, Health Surveys, etc.
- Indian School and Mission Records
- Church/ Missionary records
- Land records – Allotment records, Trust Lands
- Probate records – administered by Indian Agencies
- Agency Correspondence and Payroll records (U.S. Government records, National Archives)
- Ethnographic, anthropology studies

DNA Testing

Testing may reveal that you have some DNA consistent with patterns unique to Indigenous populations; it will not identify the Tribe, or the exact blood quantum.

Is generally more helpful in proving a blood relationship to another individual.

ONLINE RESOURCES

For specific record groups:

- **Tribal census and annuity rolls** – Ancestry.com, FamilySearch, Fold3.com, HeritageQuest.
- **Five Civilized Tribes, Dawes Rolls applications** – Fold3.com
- **Land Allotments** – US. Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office, Patent Search; HistoryGeo.com, some allotment rolls on Ancestry.com

General Resources:

- AccessGenealogy - <https://accessgenealogy.com/native-american>
- National Archives - <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans>
- FamilySearch Wiki – Starting Native American Research - https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Starting_Native_American_Research

SUGGESTED READINGS

General

- Driver, Harold E. *Indians of North America*
- Hirschfelder, Arlene & Kreipe de Montano, Martha. *The Native American Almanac.*
- Kirkham, Kay. *Our Native Americans: Their Records of Genealogical Value* (2 volumes)
- Swanton, John R. *Indian Tribes of North America*

Five Civilized Tribes, Cherokee

- Carter, Kent. *The Dawes Commission and the Allotment of the Five Civilized Tribes, 1893 – 1914*
- Gormley, Myra. *Cherokee Connections*
- Lennon, Rachel Mills. *Tracing Ancestors Among the Five Civilized Tribes: Southeastern Indians Prior to Removal.*
- Starr, Emmet. *Old Cherokee Families and Their Genealogies from Emmet Starr's History of the Cherokee Indians and their Legends and Folklore; reprint with comprehensive index*

DNA

Estes, Roberta. *DNA for Native American Genealogy.* (2021) Genealogical Publishing Company.

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