

# *Tracing Your Ancestry*



Getting Started: Be prepared to do a lot of research. For some, it is a close step to identifying their Indian heritage, for others, it may be a web of confusing directions, lost records in so-called "courthouse fires" or sadly enough, dead ends. For those people who believe there is Indian lineage in their family but aren't sure what tribe, you must first find out where your family members were living. Most likely, before 1850, American Indian tribes and their tribal members were near their original homelands. You would first need to learn the history of that area, then you will know which direction to go in your search.

Family Records need to be at hand, such as birth, death, marriage certificates. You may look for those family records at the state level, not the federal level.

If you find your family was affiliated with a tribe but would like to be an enrolled tribal member, contact the tribe for their Tribal enrollment criteria. The criterion varies from tribe to tribe, so uniform membership requirements do not exist. Two requirements for membership are lineal decendancy from someone named on the tribe's base roll or relationship to a tribal member who descended from someone named on the base roll. Conditions such as tribal blood quantum, tribal residency, or continued contact with the tribe are common.

Regarding those seeking their Cherokee lineage but can't find documentation: We would first like to note that not all Indian people chose to sign on to the Dawes Rolls when the Dawes Commission was active. Because of a history of persecution and distrust to the U.S. Government, many had reason not to claim their Indian heritage. Not because they weren't proud but because they were afraid their children would be taken away to boarding schools, their livestock or belongings would be taken away during the Civil War, and numerous other reasons. The Dawes Commission sign-up was taking place only 50 years after the end of the Relocation Era which involved unspeakable atrocities put upon many Indian people such as the Trail of Tears. Hence the reasoning for the "distrust".

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

Valuable records of federal government agencies, including records from various field offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, have been deposited throughout the United States. National Archives records, 1830-1940, deal chiefly with Indians who maintained their tribal status. These records include lists relating to Indian removal, annuity pay rolls, annual tribal census rolls of Indians who were under the Bureau's jurisdiction (living on reservations), special rolls relating to Eastern Cherokees, claims relating to Eastern Cherokees, estate files and Carlisle Indian School Files. The Bureau of Indian Affairs census rolls are separate from and unrelated to the federal decennial census schedules.

Any American Indian who fought with federal troops may have a record of veteran's benefits or bounty land. The National Archives military records section has a separate alphabetical file for each Indian veteran who served prior to 1870.

The staff of the National Archives and its branches cannot perform research for individuals. The National Archives branch in Fort Worth, TX has one of the largest collections of American Indian genealogy materials, much of which is on microfilm and is available to you through interlibrary loan to a library in your area. For a complete list of holdings write: Chief, Archives Branch, Federal Archives and Records Center, P. O. Box 6216, Fort Worth, TX 76115. Most of these records are full of family history details such as both Indian and "English" names, sex, degree of Indian blood, names of family, guardian, tribal and "band" affiliations, residence and occupation.

## INDIANS IN THE CENSUS RECORDS

Early federal census records, 1790-1850, included Indians only if they lived in settled areas, were taxed, and did not maintain a tribal affiliation. These censuses did not specify their race. Indians were indicated as white, if living with white settlers, or black, if living with African Americans. Indians who lived on reservations or who roamed as nomads over unsettled tracts of land and were not taxed and were not counted in these federal censuses.

In the 1860 Federal Census, the category of "Indian (taxed)" was added. The 1870-1910 censuses included the category of Indian, whether taxed or not, but no Indians living on reservations were recorded in the federal censuses until 1890. Because the census of 1890 was destroyed however, the 1900 federal census is the first census available listing Indians on reservations. Microfilm of federal censuses is available through interlibrary loan from the Census Microfilm Rental Program, P. O. Box 30, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701-0030, or by personal rental from Heritage Quest Genealogical Services, P. O. Box 329, Bountiful, Utah, 84011, phone (800) 760-2455.

#### OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Oklahoma Historical Society, 2100 N. Lincoln, Oklahoma City, OK 73105, has a large collection of Indian tribal records that pertain mainly to the five Civilized Tribes--Cherokee, Creek, Seminole, Choctaw and Chickasaw. In addition, they have many printed census rolls and other secondary source materials on the 65 tribes who made their way to Oklahoma. The records in the Indian Archives collection are not complete in every category, and there is no comprehensive index for all documents. A thorough search requires a great deal of time. Genealogical questions requiring extensive research cannot be answered by mail. Names of researchers who search for a fee are available from the Oklahoma Historical Society.

#### SUGGESTED WEBSITES:

**NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE** gives step-by-step instructions on how to trace your American Indian ancestry. A wide array of benefits accrue to official members of American Indian tribes...college grants, healthcare....But the most lasting benefit may be in finally finding your lost tribe.

Cyndi's List of Genealogy Sites on the Internet A comprehensive collection of genealogy resources on the Internet, including over 43,550 links in over 100 categories.

Genealogy Homepage, The A well maintained list of genealogy resources on the Internet, including a link to information on genealogy software.

GenSource.com A free online resource for genealogist, or anyone looking for family roots.

Family Tree Maker's Genealogy Site "The largest and most complete online genealogy resource"

Ancestry.com "The number one source for family history research online"

#### PROFESSIONAL RESEARCHERS

Board for Certification of Genealogist - Roster of those certified with a specialty in Native American Genealogy  
The Association of Professional Genealogists- a list of genealogists who specialize in Native American genealogy (To reach this specific list of genealogists, do a search on this page by leaving all fields blank except "Research Specialty" where you will choose "Native American" and hit "Search".)  
Genealogy Central Lineage Service Specializes in Native American, New England and Colonial American research.

If you are interested in communicating with people of the same interests in genealogy, check out [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)