

A DNA test can show Native ancestry, but tribes do not accept that as proof since such testing does not identify tribal affiliation.

Even if you cannot document your family story of Native ancestry, value the history of your family that endured the hardships and challenges of living in early Oklahoma.

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## Definitions

**Census cards** - lists age, blood quantum, earlier enrollments and family members for the enrollee, and may include information about their family members. This card includes the tribal affiliation, census card number, and an enrollment number for each person enrolled.

**Enrollment packets** - transcripts of the interviews conducted with the applicants by the Dawes Commission members. These packets, also known as application packets or jackets, may provide further details about the individual and their family, including marriage, birth, and death information.

There are very few packets available for the Muscogee (Creek). If you are searching for a Muscogee person, be sure to check both printed and online indexes. NOTE: Enrollment packets are different from allotment packets. OHS has some allotment maps; packets are available at the National Archives in Fort Worth: [archives.gov](https://www.archives.gov). You can also visit the Family Search website to view allotment packets online at [familysearch.org](https://www.familysearch.org).

**1896 applications** - enrollment was begun in 1896 but started over in 1898. Most persons on the 1896 rolls did not make it onto the final Dawes Roll (1898).

**Minor or newborn** - a child born after the initial enrollment (when their parents enrolled) but prior to finalization of the rolls in March 1907.

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## More Resources at the OHS

### US Federal Census

Use the census records available through Ancestry.com or Heritage Quest to track your family. Begin with the most recent census available and locate them each census date.

### Index to the Dawes Final Rolls

This index is available in several places, both in print and online, but one of the easiest is on the Oklahoma Historical Society website at [okhistory.org/dawes](https://okhistory.org/dawes).

### Fold3

Use the Native American Collection on Fold3 (subscription) database to search for Dawes census cards. Note the tribe and enrollment number and search for the individual's packet on this site. Enrollment cards and packets are also available at the Research Center.

For more information, read *The Dawes Commission: And the Allotment of the Five Civilized Tribes, 1893-1914* by Kent Carter

“*The Establishment of the Dawes Commission for Indian Territory*” by Loren N. Brown in *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, v. 18, no. 2.

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[okhistory.org/research](https://okhistory.org/research)

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Oklahoma Historical Society  
Research Center

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# Finding Your Native American Ancestors

## Research Guide

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Tracing Native American ancestors from the Five Tribes

If you have family in Oklahoma, you likely have a family story of Native American ancestry. This is a quick guide to help you begin to document that story. In Oklahoma, the tribes most people believe their ancestors belong to are the Five Tribes: Choctaw, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole. To be a member of these tribes today, a person has to be a direct descendant of an individual who was enrolled by the Dawes Commission 1898–1907.

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## The Basics

1. You must do your genealogy. Get a pedigree chart and start filling in the blanks—ask your extended family for help. When and where were your family members born? Record the places and dates; even an estimate will help.
2. Use the federal censuses to trace your family line back to 1900 in order to determine if they were in the right place at the right time. You can use the census records on Ancestry.com or HeritageQuest, which are available on all the Research Center's computers.
3. Was your family living in Indian Territory in 1900? This is key, because applicants were required to be living in Indian Territory to qualify for enrollment (with the exception those enrolled as Mississippi Choctaw. Track your family back to the 1900 census to determine if they met this requirement.
4. If you find your direct line (not an aunt or uncle, but a great-grandparent) was living in Indian Territory on the 1900 census, check the Dawes Rolls index. You can do

this in the Research Center, or check the index online at [okhistory.org/dawes](http://okhistory.org/dawes).

5. If you find your ancestor's name on the Dawes Roll index, look at the age. Does it match (within 2–3 years) the age your ancestor was in 1902? If you are using the online index, click on the census card number to see the names of the people on that census card. Do you recognize these names as other family members?
6. Use the microfilm OR the Dawes Rolls on Fold3.com to examine the census card AND the packet. The packet will provide information about the family—this is the transcript of the interviews that the applicants went through when they applied for tribal membership. Applicants had to document their ancestry by proving they were on an earlier tribal roll or descended from someone who was. This will help you determine if you have the right person or a person with the same name.
7. If you find your ancestor on the Dawes Rolls and you wish to apply for tribal membership, you will have to prove your descentance from that person. This is done by collecting birth, marriage, and death records. Requirements for application to each tribe are available on their website and at tribal headquarters.

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## Not on the Dawes Rolls?

The major problem people encounter when attempting to document a family tradition is the uncertainty of how and when Native ancestry enters into a pedigree. Many times the tradition is

there but the identifying details are not, leaving supporting evidence hard to find. You may want to check the available lists for rejected Dawes applications. These are available at the Research Center.

Perhaps your ancestor was a member of another tribe that was not part of the Dawes enrollment process; the Dawes Rolls were for the Five Tribes only. You may want to check other tribal rolls at the Research Center such as Kiowa, Cheyenne, Comanche, Osage, Sac and Fox, Pawnee, Apache, etc. There are 38 federally recognized tribes with headquarters in Oklahoma!

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## Keep in Mind

In 1900 there were three times more white persons living in Indian Territory than there were Native Americans. The purpose behind the Dawes Commission was to break up the lands held in common by the tribes, assign a specific tract of land to each individual, and open up the remainder for settlement by non-Natives.

Remember that on the 1900 and 1910 censuses (or any census), persons could claim ancestry if they so chose. Being listed on the separate census population schedules for Indians does not determine tribal membership—finding a person classified as Indigenous on these special federal schedules has no bearing on whether a person is considered Indigenous by officials.

It is entirely possible that your relatives were Indigenous but if they did not enroll with the Dawes Commission, their descendants are not recognized by the tribes nor the federal government today.