



## FINDING YOUR AMERICAN INDIAN ANCESTORS | RESEARCH GUIDE

Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center [www.okhistory.org/research](http://www.okhistory.org/research)

**If you have family in Oklahoma at almost any time period, you likely have a family story of American Indian 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 one of the Five Civilized Tribes—Choctaw, Cherokee, Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), and Seminole. To be a member of these tribes today, a person has to be a direct descendant of a person enrolled by the Dawes Commission 1898–1907.

### Here are 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 available on [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com) or [Heritage Quest](http://Heritage Quest) available on all the Research Center's computers.
3. Was your family living in Indian Territory in 1900? Why is this important? Applicants were required to be living in Indian Territory in order to qualify for tribal enrollment. 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 on a computer or on microfilm at the Research Center, OR you can check the index online at [okhistory.org/research/dawes](http://okhistory.org/research/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 CC# and see the other names of the persons on that census card. Do you recognize these names as other family members?
6. Use the microfilm OR the Dawes Rolls on [fold3.com](http://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 “Indianess” 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 descendancy from that person. This is done by collecting birth, marriage and death records. Specific requirements for application to each tribe are available on their websites and at their tribal headquarters.

- **Cherokee Nation** [cherokee.org](http://cherokee.org)
- **Choctaw Nation** [choctawnation.com](http://choctawnation.com)
- **Chickasaw Nation** [chickasaw.net](http://chickasaw.net)
- **Muscogee (Creek) Nation** [muscogeenation-nsn.gov](http://muscogeenation-nsn.gov)
- **Seminole Nation** [sno-nsn.gov](http://sno-nsn.gov)

What if your family member is NOT found on the Dawes Rolls? The major problem people encounter when attempting to document a family tradition is the uncertainty of how and when Indian 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 Civilized Tribes only. You may want to check other tribal rolls at the Research Center such as Kiowa, Cheyenne, Comanche, Osage, Sac & Fox, Pawnee, Apache, etc. There are 38 federally recognized tribes with headquarters in Oklahoma!

## Keep in Mind:

In 1900 there were three times more white persons living in Indian Territory than there were Indians living there.

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 Indian individual, and open up the remainder for settlement by non-Indians.

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

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

A DNA test can show Indian 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 Indian ancestry, value the history of your family that endured the hardships and challenges of living in early Oklahoma.

## Some 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 as well as the census card number and a tribal enrollment 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. **NOTE:** There are very few packets available for the Muscogee (Creek) tribe. If you are checking for a Muscogee person, be sure to check both printed as well as online indexes.

[NOTE: Enrollment packets are different from allotment packets. OHS has some allotment maps but for allotment packets, you will need to contact the National Archives in Fort Worth. The website for this agency is <http://archives.gov/southwest>. Email is [ftwortharchives@nara.gov](mailto:ftwortharchives@nara.gov).]

**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 Rolls (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.

## Major Resources at OHS:

### US Federal Census

Use the census available through Ancestry.com or HeritageQuest 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 at the OHS website at [okhistory.org/research/dawes](http://okhistory.org/research/dawes).

### Fold3

Use the “Native American Collection” on the Fold3 (subscription) database to search for the census card listing for your family members. Note the tribe and enrollment number and search for the individual’s packet on this site. These cards and packets are also available on microfilm at the OHS Research Center.

For more information on the Dawes Commission and the enrollment process, read *The Dawes Commission: And the Allotment of the Five Civilized Tribes, 1893–1914* by Kent Carter.

**Dawes Commission** in *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* online at [okhistory.org/encyclopedia](http://okhistory.org/encyclopedia)

“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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