

# Native, First Nations, Indian: Researching Indigenous Peoples



Judy Nimer Muhn, Lineage Journeys

<http://www.LineageJourneys.com>  
[judynmuhn@gmail.com](mailto:judynmuhn@gmail.com) 248-736-7770

While this session will review and provide guidance on basic methods of the rich resources of information for Native/First Nations peoples, this session will not discuss the tribal enrollment process. Each tribe, as sovereign nations, create their own enrollment information. Once you are reasonably sure of your relevant Native lineage, you should contact the tribal "Enrollment Office" or tribal council for information on enrollment requirements, procedures and necessary documents. Most tribes have this information also on official websites.

## Remember these strategies and keys for Native/First Nations research:

- Do genealogy as you would do it for any family – begin with yourself and move backward in time, documenting everything as you go.
- Research all family members and document their lives through birth, marriage, death and census records.
- Information is only as accurate as those sharing wanted it to be – information was given voluntarily by someone in the household but they may have had a reason to "fabricate" information.
- Records may give English names and Native names – it is fortunate when you can obtain records that have BOTH names together, to help in confirming how to track families and members.
- Children in the household may be the children of either the father or mother, and maybe not both.
- Indexes are secondary records – check them against the original records.
- Look at the whole neighborhood for the families living nearby – these could be helpful in marriages, info about the ancestral home and ethnic groups in the area (a potential clue if you don't know the family's origins).
- Find your family in any rosters or lists, and track them through time including their siblings. If you can't find your direct ancestor by name, look for former neighbors, siblings, etc.

## Specific to Native/First Nations Peoples:

- Geography is key – tracking where and when your ancestors were in a region, can narrow down the tribal connections and relationships that will guide your research.

- Records specific to tribal affiliation – allotments, rolls, land records, and reservation connections – are easier to find IF you know the tribe!
- Learn about naming patterns, family relationships, clans or other groupings.
- Occupations can sometimes give hints about tribal affiliations – remember to use FAN (friends, acquaintances, neighbors) too.

## Websites:

- **List of Federally-Recognized Tribes**, by state: The process for recognition by the states and federal government are complicated and lengthy. Groups seeking recognition must prove historical/anthropological/archeological evidence of their existence as a community within a geography, documentation of those who are affiliated with the community and more. (<http://www.ncsl.org/research/state-tribal-institute/list-of-federal-and-staterrecognized-tribes.aspx>)
- Ancestry.com has digitized and indexed Native American enrollment cards and lists records in specific states that apply to Native ancestry. (<https://www.ancestrycdn.com/support/us/2016/11/researchamericanindianancestors.pdf> )
- Oklahoma Historical Society (<http://www.okhistory.org>) – Indexed records especially of the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole) but also other tribal groups.
- A Guide to Tracing Your American Indian Ancestry – Department of the Interior <https://www.doi.gov/tribes/trace-ancestry> This guide discusses how to begin genealogy research.
- Starting Genealogy and Family History Research - National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) <https://www.archives.gov/research>  
NARA explains what types of information are needed for genealogy research and highlights books that focus on the research process and document collection.
- [Genealogy Research](http://web.archive.org/web/20081120194049/http://www.ntjrc.org/native/genealogy.asp) <http://web.archive.org/web/20081120194049/http://www.ntjrc.org/native/genealogy.asp> From the National Tribal Justice Resource Center, this web page includes excerpts from the Department of Interior Genealogy Guide and other links to directories, resources and guides.
- [Access Genealogy](http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/) <http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/> This web page has several features. On the right side in the menu bar is a link to "Native American Nations" that provides historical information about tribes. In the middle of the page are links to agencies with genealogical information by state.
- Native Americans – "Specific Tribal or Nation Resources" and "USGenWeb Project" <http://www.cyndislist.com/native.htm>

These two sections of this web page (toward the bottom) connect people to resources of specific tribes, which include some tribal web sites. But other sections of this site also link to resources that are tribe-specific, such as "Mailing Lists, Newsgroups, and Chat."

- Vital Records – Native American Directory  
<http://www.daddezio.com/records/room/indian.html>

This web site offers a search feature by tribe. Each tribal section contains contact information for genealogical records or information and links to online and other resources (some are advertised as free and some are advertised for sale).

- The Genealogy Page – National Archives and Record Administration (NARA)  
<https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans> This section contains links to web sites of census rolls, military records, photos and more. NARA also provides publications for sale and information about workshops offered at various regional locations.

## **INDIAN or TRIBAL ROLLS:**

### **National Archives, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Rolls:**

<https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/rolls> There are many "rolls" or census records of native people in the United States (Baker, Guion Miller, Kern-Clifton, Roblin, Wallace, etc.)

### **Baker Roll:** <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/rolls/baker-roll.html>

Covering 1924-1929 for the Eastern Cherokee, earlier rolls were combined to create these rolls. Earlier rolls include the 1835 Census for Cherokees living east of the Mississippi, 1884 Hester Roll (which also appears on Fold3.com), the 1907 Council Roll, 1908 Churchill Roll and the 1909 Guion Mill Roll.

### **Dawes Rolls:** <https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/dawes/tutorial/intro.html>

Tribal enrollment between 1899 and 1907 - Five Civilized Tribes who resided in the Indian Territory, which later became the eastern portion of Oklahoma. The Five Civilized Tribes consist of the Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole and Chickasaw Indians.

**Guion-Miller Roll:** Compiled from the Eastern Cherokee claims of 1905, these records were compiled to determine who received a portion of the \$1M appropriation from the U.S. Court of Claims. A free index is available at NARA

(<https://www.archives.gov/research/nativeamericans/rolls/guion-miller.html#list>) and the lists appear on both Fold3.com and Ancestry.com.

### **Indian Census Rolls :** [https://www.archives.gov/research/census/native-](https://www.archives.gov/research/census/native-americans/18851940.html)

[americans/18851940.html](https://www.archives.gov/research/census/native-americans/18851940.html) 1885-1940 - Contains census rolls that were usually submitted each year by agents or superintendents in charge of Indian reservations, to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, as required by an act of July 4, 1884 (23 Stat. 98). The data on the rolls vary, but usually given are the English and/or Indian name of the person, roll number, age or date of birth, sex, and relationship to head of family.tp

**Kern-Clifton Roll** from 1897, of Cherokee Freedmen are also potentially available but the NARA website is currently not functioning (check back on the NARA site, rolls list to determine if the link is corrected).

**Roblin Roll:** Known as "Washington, Enrollment and Allotment Applications of Washington Indians, 1911-1919", this roll was created when tribal people protested that they were not receiving help from the government and not enumerated on other rolls.

(<https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/rolls/roblin.html>) These can be accessed through Ancestry.com, FamilySearch.org, and at NARA on computers.

AND there are individual tribal enrollment records, held by Tribal Enrollment Offices, that may or may not be available for public review (they are most often NOT online) and establish who is able to receive benefits and services from a given tribal government. Efforts are also underway at NARA to digitize the 377 Native Treaties (in news released in 2018 – see announcement here: (<https://www.archives.gov/news/articles/efforts-begin-to-digitize-377-native-america-treaties?fbclid=IwAR2sD6SpimGAM274rx3DhrOhvge0FK8ePRuVJ3zr-5Z7RCdGfN4SlqMYXew>))

#### **Federal Sources:**

Indian Census and Annuity Rolls document tribal groups, individuals and families for a variety of reasons. The National Archives, Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs have been preserved on microfilm, microfiche and online. There are collections of Indian school records, allotment records and proceedings, reports to Congress by Indian Agents and the Department of the Interior (documenting who was occupying what "reservations" and what leaders/chiefs were principally there), federal court cases and more. With the massive collections of these records, you will want to check here:

<https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans>

Facebook Groups: Be sure to look for the group for the tribe that you are studying. [Katherine Willson's "Genealogy on Facebook" document has been taken into Cyndi's List at: https://cyndislist.com/facebook](#)