

# Records for Native American Family Research

For someone who wants to go deep into researching Native American family members, there are a number of different kinds of documents that can provide amazing detail into the lives of individual Native Americans and tribes. Some of these records are available online, but many of them will require a written request at minimum and perhaps a visit to a records repository at maximum. Make no mistake, the detail you can uncover makes it worth the effort.

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## Census Records

The Federal Population schedules from 1790-1940 are the most commonly used. However, don't overlook Indian Census Rolls from 1885-1940. These are generally available on paid sites like Ancestry.com and Fold3.com as well as free sites like Accessgenealogy.com.

Agents and superintendents at American Indian reservations annually submitted census rolls starting in 1885. These rolls include individuals and families who maintained a formal connection with Federally-recognized tribes. To research these records, you will need the name of the individual or family.

The questions found on the Indian Census Rolls and the process for collecting the information were not standardized, and therefore vary between years, tribes, and agents and superintendents.

Note: there is not a census for every reservation or every tribe for every year.

Indian Census Rolls can include: Name (American Indian and/or English), Gender, Age, Birth date, Agency /Reservation name, Marital status, Tribe, Family Relation

The Indian Census Rolls, 1885-1940, are available online at Ancestry.com and Fold3.com. Prior to digitization, these records were accessible via microfilm publication M595. Knowing the tribe can help narrow the search results on Ancestry and Fold3. Many public libraries provide free on-site access to Ancestry.com and Fold3.com.

## Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Records

Records in this category include Allotment Records, Applications & Case Files, Rolls, BIA records for each state, agencies, bands and tribes, BIA Schools, Federal records

ALLOTMENT RECORDS include both financial and property transactions that were administered by the BIA. Property is not just land, but can include buildings, finances and timber. Examples from the National Archives include records such as Allotment Heirship List, ca. 1896 - ca.1920, from the Shoshone Agency.

Typically, when you think of allotment records, you think about the Dawes Roll. However, other tribes had land allotments including the Mission Agency (1940-1946), White Earth Agency (1892) and the Choctaw and Chickasaw Allotment Ledgers 1903-1910, just to name a few.

APPLICATIONS AND CASE FILES include documents relating to Education, Finances, Land, lease, mining or timber, removal of restrictions, Social welfare and benefits, tribal citizenship and enrollment. Examples include Applications for Individual Indian Money Expenditures, 1915-1918, at the Cushman Indian School in Tacoma, Washington available from the National Archives.

ROLLS are documents that, in many cases, are payment or disbursement rolls created by law or treaty. They include the more well-known rolls such as the Dawes Roll, but the National Archives also keeps rolls

such as the 1830 Armstrong Roll (Census Concerning Choctaw Removal, Muster Rolls Concerning Indian Removal (1832-1846), Osage Annuity Rolls 1870-1960 and Grazing Payment Rolls 1923-1928 for the Yakima Nation of Washington state.

BIA RECORDS for states and agencies include: Account ledgers, Case files, Censuses, Correspondence, Enrollments, Estate cards, Issuances, Leases, Reports, Resolutions and more. These are held in Record Group 75 at the National Archives.

BIA SCHOOL RECORDS are kept by the National Archives and include records of schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Students were often sent to schools by the Indian Agency which had jurisdiction over their tribe. Churches, local communities and even the tribes themselves also operated schools and those records would reside with those entities.

PRESENT-DAY RECORDS include documents held by the National Archives from agencies such as the American Indian Records Repository (AIRR). The area Indian Affairs Records from BIA agencies and Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians (OST). Records include trust, education and other historic records. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) records include frequent interaction and overlap with American Indian land. The Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB) promotes authentic Indian arts and crafts by way of the Indian Arts and Crafts Act. They produce a publication titled, "Source Directory of American Indian and Alaska Native Owned and Operated Arts and Crafts Businesses."

## School Records

Documents in this group include student case files from non-reservation boarding schools. In addition to administrative records, most of these non-reservation schools created and maintained a case file for each student. The information found in these case files generally include: Student's name, Degree of Indian blood, Tribal affiliation, Names and tribal affiliations of the student's parents or guardians, Home address, Religious affiliation, Dates of attendance. These records are held by the National Archives.

## Employment Records

Records in this group include the Official Register of the United States 1817-1925, Employee Appointments 1849-1907, Rosters of Employees 1848-1963 and Official Personnel Folders (OPFs) 1850-1951. The National Archives website includes a description of these records: "Thousands of individuals worked in federal offices responsible for the administration of American Indians including reservations, agencies, and related affairs. While some employees such as agents, officials, and superintendents were appointed to their positions, many people like teachers, nurses, and construction workers submitted applications."

## Military Service Records

"From the earliest years of United States history, American Indians have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Ever since General George Washington noted the American Indians' skills as scouts and light troops during the Revolutionary War, they have participated in every major conflict, including both sides of the American Civil War. In unique services such as U.S. Army Indian Scouts and the U.S. Army and Marine Corps code talkers in both World Wars, American Indians have participated with distinction throughout America's military history," *National Archives web page.*

Records in this category include Discharge Papers, Military Personnel Files and Pension files. Some are held by the National Archives, including Service and Pension Records, but you can locate other military records, including Revolutionary War and Civil War service records, on sites such as Fold3.com and Ancestry.com.

## Land Records

Since title to much of the land in the U.S. started with Native American nations, land records are always a good place to look. You can start with land titles in the county courthouse or county clerk's office, but you can go as far as state land grand offices, Federal agencies like the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the tribes themselves, who will also keep records of their land holdings typically from allotment or when a reservation was formed.

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*Much of this information (and more) can be found at  
<https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/research-individual-more.html>*

*For more articles on researching your Native American ancestry, check out [www.nativefamilyresearch.com](http://www.nativefamilyresearch.com)*