

# Genealogy

Whether you want to become an enrolled member of a federally recognized tribe, verify a family tradition that you descended from the Cherokee, or just want to learn more about your roots, researching your Cherokee family tree beings just like any other genealogy research - with yourself. The menu at left contains additional resources that will aid you in your quest.

## How to search for your Cherokee ancestors

Unless you have a large collection of facts on your Cherokee ancestor, including names, dates, and tribe, it is usually NOT helpful to begin your search in Cherokee records or rolls. First, learn everything that you can about your parents, grandparents, and more distant ancestors, including ancestral names; dates of birth, marriages, and death; and the places where your ancestors were born, married, and died.

During the initial phase of your research, the goal, especially for tribal membership purposes, is to establish and document the relationships of Cherokee ancestors. Study the localities in which your Indian ancestors were born and lived. Gather together everything you have -- papers, photos, documents and family heirlooms. Rummage through your attic or basement, the filing cabinet, the back of the closet.... Then check with your relatives to see if they have any family documents they are willing to share. Clues to your family history might be found on the backs of old photographs, in the family bible, or even on a postcard. If your relative is uneasy with lending an original, offer to have copies made.

While you're collecting family records, set aside some time to interview your relatives. Start with Mom and Dad and then move on from there. Try to collect stories, not just names and dates, and be sure to ask open-ended questions. Write down everything you have learned from your family and begin to enter the information in a pedigree or family tree chart. There are automated programs online that make this step easy. Some have free trial memberships that are long enough to accomplish all you will need to do. These charts provide an at-a-glance overview of your family, making it easy to track your research progress. The online versions will also offer additional information and suggestions to aid you in your search.

Select a single surname, individual, or family with which to begin. Focusing your family history search helps keep your research on track, and reduces the chance of missing important details due to sensory overload. As much as you might want to, you can't do it all at once.

Check online archived newspapers and for:

**Obituaries and death listings** - While the amount of information on deaths found in newspapers is inconsistent, newspaper obituaries may include such details as place and date of birth; names of siblings, parents, and other surviving relatives; occupation; military service; and even the church where the funeral was held. Keep in mind that obituaries can appear weeks after the actual date of death.

**Birth announcements and christenings** - Not commonly reported in nineteenth-century newspapers, birth announcements placed in local newspapers gradually became popular in the early 1900s.

Wedding vows and anniversary announcements - News of nuptial agreements usually appeared in columns of local news or, sometimes, in a separate listing of marriage announcements. Reports range from brief mentions of marriage licenses applications to full accounts of the wedding ceremony. Major wedding anniversaries - twenty-five, fifty, or more years of marriage - often warranted a newspaper mention.

Society news and local gossip - Most newspapers had a column for residents to submit local news that might be of interest to others. This would often include such tidbits on area residents as birthday announcements, illnesses, job promotions, wedding announcements, visitors to the community, and other news of a more personal nature.

Public announcements and advertisements - Livestock, farm equipment, and even personal property were often sold at public sales which might be found listed in small classified advertisements. Advertisements and announcements concerning insolvent debtors, forced land sales, professional services, runaway slaves, and missing relatives are also particularly relevant for the genealogist.

Legal notices - Some judicial actions, such as proving of wills, land sales for payment of taxes, divorce proceedings, proving of heirs, and the settlement of estates, cannot be concluded without public notice. Local newspapers are often a good source for such legal announcements.

Transfers of real estate - Local columns often kept area residents informed on who was going and coming in the neighborhood. More recent newspapers usually list real estate transactions in the classified or legal notices section.

Unclaimed mail lists - Periodically published by smaller newspapers, these are lists of letters, often sent by anxious relatives, which went unclaimed at the post office. Useful for potentially identifying ancestors who pulled up stakes and moved to a new location.

Church announcements - Many churches submitted lists of new members, baptisms, confirmations, and other church news to local newspapers for publication.

Military news - Items about hometown boys and girls heading off to war, along with news when they wrote home, commonly found their way into print.

School news and activities - School news, often found in the local news column, might include lists of students who made the honor roll, awards won by area students, school board minutes, school events, and detailed coverage of annual graduation ceremonies.

Use our site and others to do some reading on tribal history. This will not only help you understand the traditions and culture of the Cherokee, but also evaluate your family stories and legends against historical facts.

Do not trust Wikipedia articles - This

information has proven time and again to be inaccurate.

Finally, search the Dawes, Baker, and other rolls for ancestors listed on the family tree you have created.

Resources:

Newspaper Archives Online

Library of  
Congress digitized newspapers

Genealogy Bank  
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