Researching Your Choctaw Ancestry

To find your ancestors, it would be helpful to know their approximate years of birth and the names of their parents, spouse(s), children, etc. But before you get that far, start with what you know, which means starting with yourself and working backwards. Find out as much information as you can about your parents, grandparents, and more distant ancestors. Write the information down. Always include maiden names for females, if known. Females will be listed under that name until they were married. Include dates and places of births, marriages, and deaths and include the places your ancestors lived between their birth and death, if known.

Talk to or write other family members and ask them to share what they know. They often have information or documentation you need. Another family member may also be working on your family tree and you can share information.

You may already have most of what you need at home. Sources of information (or clues to the facts of the past) can come from birth certificates, marriage licenses, death certificates, divorce decrees, newspaper clippings, family bibles, diaries and letters. Check out the county courthouse for records on marriages, divorces, deeds and wills (probate). Cemetery records are also sometimes useful. A great place to find cemetery information (birth and death dates on headstones) without having to actually go to the cemetery is by looking at the searchable website www.findagrave.com. If you know the area your ancestors lived in, check with those libraries to see what county and state history books are on file that might contain information you need. County histories help fill in the gaps in information and many times answer questions as to why people relocate and where they went. Many public libraries have an area dedicated to genealogy. Many university libraries also have genealogical and historical collections available to researchers as well.

Genealogical and historical societies, both local and state, are good sources of information. Many have copies of county school records, family histories, censuses, old newspapers, cemetery records and funeral home records, etc. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) Family History Library has “branch” locations called Family History Centers at many of their local facilities. The Family History Library contains a huge collection of genealogical documents that may be useful in research. The Family History Centers can order copies of most of the collection. The Familysearch website has many documents online (www.familysearch.org). Also, many online genealogical sites such as Rootsweb (www.rootsweb.com) and Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com) have searchable online databases that may help. Many people post their family trees on these sites as well and information can be gained that way too. You may find some of your ancestors included in someone else’s tree.

Another great way to find out information about your family is by researching the US Census records, which are accessible online. The US Census Bureau releases census records every ten years. The last census released was the 1940 census. You can search the census by name and find your relatives who were living in 1940 on these records. By locating them, you will find out names of persons who lived in your family members’ households at the time the census was recorded. Their ages at the time of the recording will be listed as well, which will give you clues to dates of birth.
There are always other people who can help you do the work if you do not want to do it yourself. Certified genealogists are available for a fee. Contact the Board of Certification of Genealogists (P.O. Box 14291, Washington, DC 20044 [www.bcgcertification.org]) or the Association of Professional Genealogists (PO Box 40393, Denver, CO 80204 [www.apgen.org]) and request their listings of genealogists for hire. Local archives, libraries, and societies may also provide the names of individuals in the area who will search records for you.

Once you have your names and dates together for your ancestors as far back as you can go, put your information together in a document that makes sense. If you don’t have access to a family pedigree chart to list your information on (these are available online from any genealogical site and are usually free) simply write the information onto a page in a format that is easy to understand. List yourself, your parents, your grandparents, great-grandparents with their dates and places of birth and death (if applicable) and begin your search in the Dawes books for anyone who may have registered as Native American.

Keep in mind before you begin your research that to apply for a CDIB (Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood) and tribal membership with the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma, you must be a descendent of someone listed as Choctaw – by blood or Mississippi Choctaw on the Final Rolls of Citizens and Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes in Indian Territory (commonly called the Dawes Roll). That ancestor must have been living in Indian Territory during the 1898 to 1906 enrollment period and must have been able to prove their Choctaw heritage thus enrolling as Choctaw. So be sure that the ancestors you concentrate heavily on are direct ancestors. Information you collect along the way on aunts, uncles and cousins will be fun facts that you can include into your records for a more concise family tree.

If you believe you are a descendent from one of those tribal members and if your ancestor was not in Oklahoma (Indian Territory) during the enrollment dates, you will not be able to receive a CDIB or Tribal Membership. Only those tribal members living with the tribe in Indian Territory during that time period were eligible to be considered registered with the tribe. This is unfortunate that many people who know their ancestors were Native American but are not eligible to become members of their respective tribe.

Start with the Final Roll index to determine your ancestor’s roll number. Many state and local historical and genealogical societies, large city libraries, and the National Archives Branch in Fort Worth, Texas, have copies of the Final Roll and Index. The rolls are searchable through the Oklahoma Historical Society’s website (www.okhistory.org/research/dawes). You can access the index on-line using the National Archives website (www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/dawes/intro.html). Once you have found your ancestor’s name, their roll number will be located on the same line. Record the name and roll number. There are several different categories of enrollment: “by blood”, “newborn”, “minor” “by marriage”, and “freedmen”. The “by blood” category included those individuals enrolled with Indian blood. “Newborn” and “minor” categories included young children of Indian and freedmen parents. “By marriage” included individuals with no Indian blood married to Indians. “Freedmen” were the former slaves of tribal members. Those individuals noted as “Freedmen” did not have Indian blood. Using the roll book, locate the Choctaw tribe and category. The names will be listed in numerical order by the roll number. The listings will include the name, age, sex, blood degree, and census card number. Add this information to the name and roll number you recorded earlier.
If your goal is to apply for your CDIB card and membership and you have found verification that your ancestor was enrolled by blood by the Dawes Commission, then you have the information that you need to apply with your tribe. You will also need to provide an original state certified birth or death certificate for each person in your lineage back to the enrollee. If you have access to the internet, you can download the CDIB and membership applications for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma from our website ([www.choctawnation.com](http://www.choctawnation.com)) or contact the Choctaw Nation CDIB/Membership Department at 1-800-522-6170 and applications will be mailed to you.

If you are also interested in finding out more about your ancestors, you can obtain copies of the Dawes Commission census cards and application packets for your ancestor. The census cards will give information about other family members who might have been enrolled and the names of the enrollee’s parents. The application packets may contain transcripts of any testimony taken by the Dawes Commission, birth and death affidavits, marriages licenses (sometimes), and correspondence between the Commission and the applicant. You can receive copies of your family members’ packets by sending an email to genealogy@choctawnation.com with your request. Include your mailing address and the census card number and ancestor’s name for each card and application packet you would like to order. There is no fee at this time. You can also order copies for a fee from a regional branch of the National Archives (the Fort Worth, Texas branch is the main repository) or the Oklahoma Historical Society. Ancestry.com ([www.ancestry.com/americanindian](http://www.ancestry.com/americanindian)) and Fold3 ([www.fold3.com](http://www.fold3.com)) now have the Dawes Commission census cards and packets available online as well. They are subscription websites, but many libraries and archives have subscriptions which you can use for free by using their computers.