

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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By Damon Veach

FEDERAL RECORDS CENTER: In a recent column, I discussed research in the Federal Records Center. The one for Louisiana is located in Fort Worth, and it is a great place to research family ties but especially those with Indian ancestries. This one in Fort Worth serves Region 7 and is located six miles from the downtown area. This is a one-story concrete building of red brick fireproof construction.

A railroad loading dock extends the full length of the building on the west side, and a covered truck dock on the east side accommodates six trucks. This storage facility is a branch of the National Archives and is equivalent to two football fields in length. About 90 per cent of the material is non-current records, and all of NASA's records – tapes, film, etc. – are housed here as well as IRS records. The center services nearly one hundred civilian and defense agencies at about a 1,000 locations in the states of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas.

All reference requests received are given in-today-out-today service. Exceptions are those requests which require a research of one hour or more. Each archives technician in the reference branch will complete over 10,000 reference requests each year.

Of extreme importance to genealogists and historians is the vast number of Indian records filed in this facility. The Indian records originated from 37 locations in Oklahoma. Included are records from agencies and schools no longer in existence. The earliest records found are the Cherokee Census Rolls of 1852 and 1867. However, some genealogical data is available on the 1819 migration in the 1896 Old Settlers' Roll.

Some 60,000 Indians were re-located on land grants and reservations between 1819 and 1880. More than 45 different tribes have been identified from the records, and more than 110,000 individuals are listed on the final rolls which were closed in the early 1900s. Almost 24,000 of these were freedmen. The records in the center had to do with these people and their heirs of full blood since 1910. In addition to census and payrolls, other records of interest to scholars include land allotments, school records, citizenship courts, and correspondence of the Dawes Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes – Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole.

Remnants of other southeastern and southern tribes have been identified within these five groups. After Kansas attained statehood, the Indian people remaining from eleven woodland tribes of the northeastern United States were settled in the northeastern corner of Oklahoma. And, finally, the largest land area of Oklahoma was originally set aside as trust lands for some 32 tribes of Plains and Texas Indians.

Within all these records are the rights as citizens for approximately 140,000 Indians whose names appear on the original records created before 1910 and to their heirs and descendants. Records here show how Oklahoma almost became two states. Sequoyah would have been the name of the portion owned by the Indian tribes. The entire eastern portion of the state was deeded outright to the Indians, and much controversy has centered on claims in this area.

There were seven runs on free land in Oklahoma, and it was not until 1907 that it became the 46th state. “Westward” for the Indians ended with Oklahoma when it became the last gathering place of the displaced Indians. Here the Indian gave up the nomadic existence of his forefathers and accepted the white man’s mode of living.

Little significance is attached to the fact that Spanish and French explorers in search of the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow traversed the Oklahoma section time and again from 1590. While the territory was still dedicated for the use of the Indians, white settlers came there in such hordes to secure land that eventually they had to be driven away by United States soldiers. The clamor for more land became so vociferous that the government purchased from the Indians about two million acres in the section adjacent to Logan and Oklahoma counties.

During the influx of new settlers, Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas farmers seemed to favor the western and the northwestern sections of the state, while those from Arkansas, Missouri, and Texas preferred the southern and the eastern parts of the states. My own Veach ancestors were involved in the free land rush to Oklahoma from Kansas, and my records tell the story vividly through the words of my ancestor, Harriet Adaline Wilson Veach. There is a grave somewhere of her first born son that has never been located, but with continued research, it will hopefully someday be located.

After Oklahoma became part of the United States with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, it was officially included in the Indian Territory. In 1812, it was combined with the Missouri Territory, and in 1819 became a part of the Arkansas Territory. I mention this here to show you that there are other areas where possible research can be done in order to locate family ties. In my last column, I mentioned how relatives living along state lines can have important records in both states. This is all so true when I think of my own family members living on either side of the Louisiana and Texas line but also the nearness of the Arkansas border. A three-state area of research has brought me lots of important information about my lineages.

Just remember when doing your research that for several years most of Oklahoma was included in what was called the Indian Territory. This carried you up to about

1893, when the section was divided into the Indian and Oklahoma Territories, so this knowledge will aid you in doing your family research.

In 1890, the territorial government was established with Guthrie as its first capital. In 1891, two new counties were formed, and in 1892, six more were formed. The Cherokee Outlet in the northwest section of the state, next to the panhandle, was opened for white settlers in 1893. A court decision and an act of Congress awarded Greer County to Oklahoma in 1896. Prior to that time, it had been claimed by both Oklahoma and Texas. Here again, you see where you may have records in both states, and also in the Federal Records Center. In 1906, Congress passed the enabling act making Oklahoma a state, and the capital was moved to Oklahoma City in 1910.

Of all the records in the Federal Records Center, the Indian deportation claims are probably the most important because of the enormous amount of data listed. However, the earliest records here are from the New Orleans court, dated 1806.

Among interesting records are those pertaining to trials of General Andrew Jackson and Jean Lafitte, records of Judge Isaac Parker and Judge John C. Watrous, provisional military court and Confederate courts in New Orleans, land suits of East Texas, the O'Henry trial at Austin, and a few Civil War records from Galveston and Austin.

Like all research centers there is no substitute for a personal visit, and living within walking distance of the location made it a great place for me to do some of my early research. The rest of my early research was done in the genealogy section located in the main library downtown. Except for limited types of records, the actual records in the Federal Records Center will be brought out for perusal. Reproductions are available for a nominal cost. Being specific with data when writing for information can bring quick results. However, any request for a Cherokee name prior to 1817 will bring a negative reply.

Like census records, all spellings of names should be considered. Prior to 1860, most of the early rolls are the Indian name. Due to attempts by various roll makers and census takers at phonetic translations the names will vary from roll to roll. Because the Indians were unaware of gender, male and female names were used interchangeably.

Most important of all when requesting data on one of the Indiana tribes is to name the tribe being researched. In the Dawes Rolls, with only five Oklahoma tribes, there are 100,000 names on 46 different rolls. Another 60 tribes have been identified as having lived in Oklahoma or Indiana Territory.

When no tribe is listed, an immediate negative reply is given. Dates, locations, events, place names, former residences, etc., are also quite important in Indian research. Each of the five tribal nations was divided into political subdivisions, 30

or more. Many of the rolls were taken and arranged by political subdivisions of that particular tribal nation.

A request for data pertaining to an individual Indian should include a properly identified roll number (if used), complete names and relationships (if known) tribal name, and the best date known. The published authenticated Rolls of the Five Tribes furnish the basic clues as to whether other records are available. The guides are not authorized for general public use.

The Federal Records Center in Fort Worth is a fascinating place to do research. If you ever have the chance, I encourage you to go there and see in person what a wealth of data can be found within its walls. You can write for information at the following address: National Archives and Records Administration, P.O. Box 6216, 501 W. Felix, Bldg. 1, Dock 1, Fort Worth, TX 76115 or call them at 817-334-5515. The Fax number is 817-334-5630.

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COLUMN INFORMATION: Correspondence to this column should be directed to Damon Veach, 709 Bungalow Lane, Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5337. Books and society publications are reviewed if sample copies are submitted with each request, and queries are published free of charge. These queries can be any length but should have a Louisiana connection by heritage or residence of researchers working on lines in other states or countries. Dated notices should be submitted several weeks prior to the scheduled event. The e-mail address is ancestorslaveach@cox.net. Claitor's Publishing can serve as a distributor for self-published genealogy titles. Go to their homepage for details on how you can obtain this service.