

CAJUNS, CREOLES, PIRATES AND PLANTERS

Your New Louisiana Ancestors Format

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INDIAN RESEARCH: Every so often, questions arise about how to go about researching Indian lineages. My own experience has been in one of the regional branches of the National Archives, namely the one in Fort Worth, Texas. The staff members here get thousands of letters from people all over the United States who are trying to prove their Indian ancestry and learn the tribe of the ancestor. Researchers are not always lucky enough to locate their ancestry, but that is something that happens a lot in genealogical research, but, then again, it could come suddenly and in a surprising way.

As an example, I got a call from a friend recently who had worked on his lineage for many years without any success or a solution to his family line, and then, out of the blue, he gets an e-mail from a lady who not only had his lineage with all corrections to his information but was pleased to give him copies of all her work. Now this doesn't happen that often, but when it does, it is a blessing and the answer to a lineage quest that is long overdue.

As with most genealogy work, the best result you can obtain is by beginning with yourself and working back in time. This will clarify some family story of an Indian lineage, and the location of that lineage will be brought forth through extensive research in the area where these ancestors lived. You just cannot start back and work forward. You have to know where you are going, and you have to realize that you may not be able to find most of the needed data in this Indian research. When you do, that is cause to really celebrate.

Interviewing family members gets you started in all of your research possibilities. Record what is known and go from there. This is sometimes where you hear of that elusive Indian in your lineage. If it isn't known, you can pick up this connection through census records or various kinds of other early data forms. Once the discovery is made, the basic information will guide you to more information on the names, places of residence, and approximate dates of birth and death.

Try to get your relatives back to 1900, and this will make research a lot easier. There are various guide books you can use to take you forward especially with Indian research. *Guide to Records in the National Archives of the United States Relating to American Indians* is a good book to have. It was written by Edward E. Hill and is available from the Government Printing Office. There is a massive amount of material out there if you just know where to find it.

Some of the records mentioned in this book have been reproduced on microfilm, so you can consult *American Indians: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications* for information. This one is available from the National Archives, Publications Sales Branch, Washington, D.C. 20408, or perhaps it is in your local

genealogical library. There is information about Indians in many Federal agencies, and you can see this immediately when you examine this publication.

Responsibility of implementing Federal policies and dealing with individual Indians fell on Indian Agents and School Superintendents. This information can be found in the regional branches of the National Archives, such as the one located in Fort Worth. This branch has records from seven agencies located in Oklahoma – Five Civilized Tribes, Kiowa, Cheyenne and Arapaho, Osage, Shawnee, Pawnee, and Miami or Quapaw. Information here concerns more than fifty tribes. Other field branches can be learned by contacting the National Archives. The one in Fort Worth covers Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

You have to realize also that the agents did not do this with the needs of genealogists in mind. They seemed to be more into civilizing the Indians and impressing their bosses. When they did record information about an individual Indian, it generally related to the payment of money, the allotment of land and its subsequent leasing or sale, and the determination of heirs entitled to inherit a deceased Indian's land or money.

Genealogists need to keep this in mind when embarking on their research. These agents were mainly keeping track of people who were recognized as tribal members and who resided with the bulk of the tribe.

For the most part, the agent did not maintain records on Indians who moved away and, in effect, ended their affiliation with the tribe. If, for example, your ancestor left the recognized boundaries of the Choctaw Nation and took up farming across the Red River in Texas or went back to Mississippi or Alabama, you will probably never find them mentioned in the agent's records.

Such people can often be found in the regular Federal population censuses that were taken every ten years, but there may be no indication that they are Indian. In addition, people who remained behind when the bulk of their tribe was moved by the Federal government will probably be "lost" as far as official records are concerned. Unfortunately, many people with legitimate claims to Indian heritage will never be able to "prove" their claim because their ancestor did not stay with the tribe or did not choose to be recorded in official records as an Indian.

My own personal Indian connection was verified by research on my Adams lineage in Arkansas. It was here that I learned of Martha Moore, a Choctaw Indian, married to Wyatt Woodruff Adams. In all the research I'm done, I have never located a connection even in my research in the archives in Fort Worth. Since the birth place was shown as Missouri, this means I will have to search another Federal Records Center in order to further my research. I haven't done this yet. I have been more concerned in locating her burial site somewhere in Texas. Most of the other relatives are buried in Panola County, Texas, but it would appear that she

may be somewhere in the Terrell, Texas area. This is a notation I made many years ago in talking with my grandmother. This is just an example of some of the data I've obtained from relatives that I have never been able to verify.

There are other centers for Indian research that you can check out. Each of these has interesting connections to U.S. history. For instance, in the critical year of 1876, Benedictine Monks came to Dakota Territory and at the request of Sitting Bull at Standing Rock set up the first of several schools. In 1966, there evolved from the schools and from the inspiration of the students the American Indian Culture Research Center at Blue Cloud Abbey.

The principal purpose of the Center is to inform the general public of the world view, the philosophy of life, and the spiritual insight of Native Peoples. It must be emphasized that no one person speaks for Indian People. There are over five hundred distinct American Indian Nations in the present United States. Each has its own language and history, its own sacred places and rituals. Each is rooted in and part of the land out of which it grew.

Researchers are invited to use the facilities of the Center, but appointments are required as is common with other institutions of this type. With so many individual groups scattered around the U.S., genealogical research gets even more complicated. Here again, this is just one of the side trips that are necessary when doing individual research. Sometimes help can be given through websites or letters, but many of these facilities require research on site only.

This gets you back to the basic rule that is observed in all genealogical research – never give up. Somewhere out there is the information you seek. You could find it by accident or someone might drop the information on you by seeing your request for help or by reading and discovering a common ancestral line.

Check first with your local genealogical library and see what is available there. Then you will be able to determine where to go from there. It may not be easy, but it will be a rewarding experience even though you may not find anything immediately. That is why you should never give up.

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FREE SERVICE: Correspondence to this column should be directed to Damon Veach, Cajuns, Creoles, Pirates and Planters, 709 Bungalow Lane, Baton Rouge, LA 70802-5337. The e-mail address is ancestorslaveach@cox.net. Queries and book reviews are printed as space permits, and you are encouraged to take advantage of this free service. 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 excellent service.