Successfully engaging in historical and genealogical research requires that one continually place one's research in the appropriate contexts. This is especially critical with Native American research. Knowledge of life patterns, religious beliefs and ceremonies, migration and settlement patterns, interactions with intruders, and all aspects of a particular First Nations culture must be a part of a family historian's research posture.

**Building a Framework**

- Brief history of "Native Americans."
  - Reason for the term Indian.
  - Myths and misconceptions.
  - Ethnocentrism.

- A different way of living and life philosophy.
  - Impact on naming patterns.
  - Impact on kinship terms.
  - Impact on migration patterns.
  - Impact on life practices.

- Three-Step Process to Determine Native Tribe of One's Ancestor
  - Thoroughly investigate the early histories of the areas where ancestral research is being considered for the identities, histories, and other data relating to Native peoples/First Nations.
  - Employ a carefully constructed and consistently applied methodology for locating the greatest number of research documents and data on the tribe of a potential ancestor.
  - Work through all the documents and other materials on a particular tribe or nation to obtain the fullest understanding of its people and the most complete individual-specific group of records.

**General Histories and Records**

- Important because Native American naming patterns, kinship terms, and inter-tribal relations typically were quite different than those of European Americans.

- Numerous histories of Native peoples/First Nations in a particular geographic area exist in public and state libraries, county and state historical societies, as well as major research repositories. Care should be exercised when using these works as they are typically written from a particular bias. These are vital for establishing which tribe(s) may have been in a particular area during particular time periods.
Many societies and organizations have compiled bibliographies of first and secondary source materials pertaining to Native Americans in specific areas. These are vital for establishing what resources are available for research & where they can be accessed.

**Establishing Tribal Affiliation**
- General histories and geographic-based information gathering are a most important first step. Both dated and contemporarily published materials are useful, and help a researcher narrow and define the tribal possibilities of a potential ancestor.
- Efforts should be made to critically evaluate oral traditions and stories preserved and communicated through generations of family members.
- Engage in a thorough study of maps and atlases indicating indigenous people in particular geographic areas.
- Assistance can be provided through the use of published community histories.
- Methodological Approach: Timelines set Native events in the context of encroaching European settlement and identify encroachers/intruders; narratives complement the detail provided by cartographic data; and bibliographies provide the researcher with additional sources of information.

**Tribe-Specific Data**
- Histories of particular tribes provide one with data on location, migration places and time periods, and customs, particularly those relating to naming patterns, marriage and burial practices, and other important life events.
- Detailing the individuals and groups (trappers, Indian agents, missionaries, government agents, etc.) who interacted with Native Americans is significant since most Native peoples have no or very few written records, with the majority of Native languages typically having a written history of a little more than one hundred years.
- City and county historical societies tend to collect the manuscript or primary source documents while local public libraries and state libraries tend to collect published accounts or secondary source materials. State historical societies are treasure troves of information and must be explored.
- Extraordinary record possibilities are available through the National Archives and its regional branches, with greater and greater numbers of records being digitized.
- As oral histories and personal narratives are used to establish tribal affiliation, they can be used in gathering more specific details about a particular Native group, band, or tribe as well. These may be found in many research collections under some form of the heading “first hand narrative accounts.”
- As the United States federal government initiated and maintained some of the earliest contacts with Native Americans, federal government documents can be a rich source of tribe-specific data.
- A Research Check-list:
  - Determine where Native tribes/First Nations originally lived, migrated, & finally settled in the 20th century.
• Use first-hand narrative accounts.
• Use official government (state and federal) records.
• Determine the tribe’s naming patterns and/or hereditary titles.
• Find the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Office that serves the tribe of your potential ancestor.
• Investigate National Archives holdings.

**Individual-Specific Data**

▲ Genealogically significant records include, but are not limited to, the following:

**Census records**  
Became a requirement in 1884; 692 rolls of NARA microfilm now online at Ancestry, Fold3, and Internet Archive; “transitional censuses” list both Native and Euro-American names; numerous names spelled phonetically; the appearance of an individual on a census does not establish Native American blood.

**Enrollment records**  
Often called the “official census rolls;” data on such records often includes name of tribe and date of validity, roll number, all associated personal names, sex, date of birth, date of death & probate number if applicable, blood degree, and the names of both parents & blood degree.

**Allotment records**  
Often referred to as “heirship records” because (a) if an allottee died, ownership of the allotment (land) would pass to his heirs and/or (b) if the allotment was to be sold, all legal heirs would have to agree to the sale.

**Indian school records**  
Could be agricultural, industrial, or missionary; the “student record” portion of school records may include name, age, sex, tribal affiliation, degree of Indian blood, names of parents, home address, dates of arrival & departure, attendance records, health cards, examinations & grades, and letters to parents. Typical the data presented is minimal but useful.

▲ Other records of genealogical consequence include will and probate cases, church records, land claims materials, government documents and treaties, periodical & special publications, and various miscellaneous records.

▲ In the twenty-first century, taking a DNA test with a reputable company may answer some general questions relative to the percentage of First Nations heritage one may be able to claim.

**Beginning Tips for Successful Genealogical Research**

▲ Begin gathering and organizing materials as one would do with any family history.
▲ Care should be taken to record all second names, other names, etc. and any other details.
▲ Attention should be paid to all possible intruders—records and impact.
▲ Need to determine the Native American tribe of the family in question.
Careful record keeping is essential.
Watch spellings -- most often names are spelled phonetically.
Record degree of Indian blood.

Select Bibliography of Legacy Sources

[www.genealogycenter.info/nara/microfilmguides/search_americanindians.php](http://www.genealogycenter.info/nara/microfilmguides/search_americanindians.php)
A detailed listing of major Native American holdings of the National Archives. Each entry typically provides a useful record group description.

This work is a good beginning guide for those new to Native American research. It establishes a reasonable methodology and provides useful definitions.

List of tribes by region of the United States. Good detailed treatment of contemporary Native issues as well as historical background of Native tribes. Additional sections include list of Native newspapers and media.

An extremely well-done monograph detailing hundreds of important sources in each of the divisions of the Library of Congress. Photographs of documents, rare works, and important monographs make the work truly outstanding. The challenge of conducting on-site research at the Library of Congress is somewhat assuaged by this work, particularly in light of the fact that a number of citations are available at other major research centers and libraries.

This work devotes over sixty pages to both a general and tribe-specific treatment of the Native American experience. While somewhat dated, the information provided is concise and accurate. The maps of Native American tribes circa 1600 & the primary location of 173 Native groups in 1970 are particularly useful.

This particular work is the most complete listing of Native American materials held by the nation’s largest archival repository. Organized by federal agency, each section contains a detailed description of the record groups held by the National Archives. From these descriptions, researchers can determine which records might provide the most consequential data for their particular projects.

This chapter in the highly acclaimed revised edition of The Source provides the researcher with sound methodology, extensive bibliographies, and carefully detailed lists of Native American records by agency office and a select list of tribes. The select list of tribes provides one with an alphabetical presentation of tribes, the agency responsible for the tribe, the location of original records, pre-1880 correspondence M234 roll number, and post-1885 census records M595 roll number.


Selected Internet Sites

American Indian Heritage Foundation Website: www.indians.org

American Indian Records Available on Microfilm at the National Archives at Fort Worth: www.archives.gov/fort-worth/finding-aids/native-american-microfilm.html

Bureau of Indian Affairs: www.indianaffairs.gov


Google

Indian Census of the United States: 1885-1940
https://archive.org/details/indian_census

National Archives & Records Administration, Indians/Native Americans
www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/native-americans.html

Native American—First Nations Snapshot (Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center)
https://acpl.lib.in.us/images/Documents/Gendocs/Subjects/native-american-sg.pdf

Native American Genealogy www.accessgenealogy.com/native-american

Native American Gateway (Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center)
www.genealogycenter.info/nativeamerican/

National Museum of the American Indian Collections
https://americanindian.si.edu/explore/collections