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Researching Five Tribes Ancestry for Enrollment or Genealogy

Important Legal Disclaimer *The information provided on this page is for general educational and historical research purposes only and does not constitute legal or tribal enrollment advice. Tribal citizenship requirements, application procedures, and eligibility rules are determined solely by each individual sovereign tribal nation and are subject to change. Our society does not process tribal applications, guarantee enrollment outcomes, or verify official eligibility. For current, official requirements and citizenship inquiries, please consult the official Registrar or Citizenship Office of the specific tribal nation directly.*

The Role of the Dawes Rolls

For researchers exploring family connections to the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), or Seminole Nations—including those researching Freedmen lineage—the **Dawes Rolls** (1898–1907) are historically considered a primary baseline record. While each tribal nation independently determines its own sovereign citizenship criteria and enrollment laws, historical research generally relies on tracing direct family lines back to individuals listed on these rolls. The information provided here is solely for educational and genealogical research purposes to help researchers locate historic family documentation that may connect their lineage to an original enrollee.

Beginner's Guide: Searching the Dawes Rolls for Indian & Freedmen Ancestry

The **Dawes Rolls** (1898–1907) were created by the Dawes Commission to enroll members of the Five Civilized Tribes (**Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole**), living in Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). This included members who were Freedmen members. Searching these records is an important step for anyone tracing Native American or Freedmen ancestry in these five nations.

To trace an ancestor successfully, you need to understand four main types of Dawes records, where to find them, and why each matters.

1. Census Cards (Enrollment Cards)

The Census Card was the initial document created when a family applied for enrollment. It served as the cover sheet for the family's file.

- **What You'll Find:**
 - Names, ages, sex, and degree of Indian blood (blood quantum) for all household members.
 - Parents' names and whether they were living, deceased, or slaves/Freedmen.
 - References to earlier tribal censuses (such as the 1880 or 1896 tribal rolls).
 - Enrollment classification (e.g., *By Blood*, *By Marriage*, or *Freedmen*).
- **Why It's Important:** It acts as a baseline genealogical snapshot that connects multiple generations in a single family unit and provides the crucial **Census Card Number** needed to locate deeper application files.



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2. Enrollment Application Packets (Jacket Files)

If an ancestor appears on a Census Card, an Enrollment Application Packet exists for them. This packet contains all the testimony, affidavits, and supporting documents gathered during the enrollment process.

- **What You'll Find:**
 - Sworn testimony and transcripts of interviews with the applicant, family members, and witnesses.
 - Marriage certificates, birth records, or affidavits of paternity.
 - Details about family origins, physical moves, and historical lineage within the tribe.
- **Why It's Important:** This is often where you find the richest personal detail and first-person stories, allowing you to hear your ancestors' voices and overcome dead ends in family history.

3. Land Allotments

The primary goal of the Dawes Commission was to divide tribal lands into individual property plots (allotments).

- **What You'll Find:**
 - Maps and legal descriptions (township, range, section) of the land granted to your ancestor.
 - Allotment patents, deeds, and land selection certificates.
 - Guardianship records if the land belonged to a minor or legally incapacitated individual.
- **Why It's Important:** Land records reveal where your ancestors lived, worked, and built their homes. They are also helpful for mapping historical family land ownership in early Oklahoma history.

4. Rejected, Denied, or Doubtful Records

Not everyone who applied was accepted onto the final rolls. Thousands of applications were turned down due to strict residency requirements, lack of official tribal standing, or bureaucratic errors.

- **What You'll Find:**
 - Transcripts explaining why the application was rejected or declared "doubtful."
 - Letters of appeal and additional witness testimonies defending the lineage claim.
 - Detailed biographical information provided by the applicant attempting to prove eligibility.
- **Why It's Important: Do not stop if your ancestor isn't on the final accepted roll.** Rejected applications often contain *more* genealogical documentation than approved ones because applicants submitted extra evidence to fight the denial.



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Where to Search Online (Free vs. Subscription Sites)

Ease of use depends on the stage of research you are performing. Below is where to access these records:

Record Type	Free Access Options	Subscription Sites
Dawes Roll Index	✓ National Archives (NARA) www.archives.gov/research/native-americans/dawes ✓ Oklahoma Historical Society www.okhistory.org/	• Ancestry.com • Fold3.com
Census Cards	✓ FamilySearch.org (Free account required) ✓ National Archives Catalog catalog.archives.gov/	• Ancestry.com • Fold3.com
Application Packets (includes rejected claims)	• Limited images available on: catalog.archives.gov familysearch.org	• Fold3.com (Primary repository with complete high-res scans; subscription required)
Land Allotments	• Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Records (moderate to difficult to research) • Local Oklahoma County Records (moderate to difficult at County level)	• Ancestry.com (Dawes Land Allotment records collection) www.ancestry.com/search/collections/3999/

💡 **Research Tip:** If you do not have personal subscriptions to Fold3 or Ancestry, check with your local public library or genealogical society. Many offer free access on-site through library editions.