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## Resources for Training American Indian Ancestry

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# Resources for Tracing American Indian Ancestry

by Lorna Avery Scott

Assisting those tracing American Indian roots can be a fascinating and rewarding endeavor. Such a search should begin with what is already known—a family name, a place of birth, a photograph, a tribal identity. If an ancestor's name and tribe are known, a phone call to the tribe's cultural director or enrollment clerk could yield the information sought. If less information is known, a more time-consuming search will be necessary. A search of this type must begin with the researcher and continue back into his/her family's history. This search may be challenging and lead down many interesting roads. If the search is successful, the knowledge of one's heritage gained will be its own reward.

The federal government has long been involved in overseeing Indian affairs. Because of this, the closest regional branch of the National Archives may have records that will be helpful and provide a good place to start. As an example, the Siletz and Grand Ronde Agencies of Oregon were established in 1856. These agencies were responsible for American Indians who had been removed from their lands in the interior valleys of western Oregon and

the southern Oregon coast. Many different tribes and bands were removed and located together on the Siletz and Grand Ronde Reservations. Closely related peoples sometimes ended up separated by the administrative boundaries of the adjoined reservations.

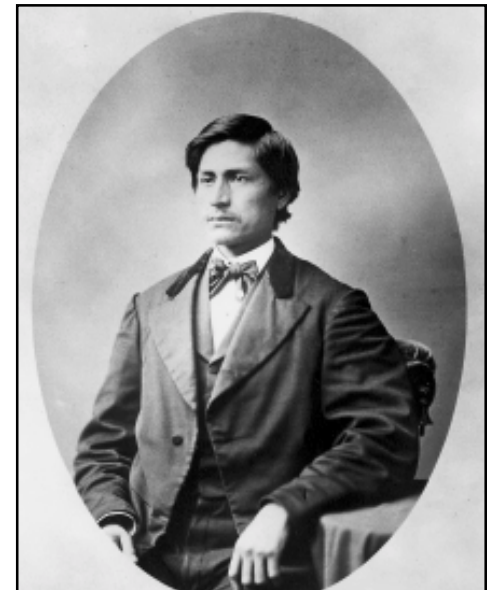
A full census of tribal members was not conducted until the 1880s. However, annuity rolls were created to direct and record the distribution of treaty-stipulated goods, and partial censuses were taken periodically from the 1850s on. Usually a partial census listed the head of each family's name as well as the number of male and female adults and children in each "household."

When the allotment of parcels of reservation lands to individual tribal members became the standard policy in the late 1880s to early 1890s, there were generally good records kept regarding this process. Allotment applications sometimes included personal information that cannot be found elsewhere. Figure 1 shows an example of this type of information that was located for me by my tribe's cultural resources director, Robert Kentta. Similarly, when original allottees passed away, there

Melissa Montgomery, my great-grandmother.



George Harney (sic), Chief of the Siletz Indians, 1875 (NARA).



were sometimes elaborate proceedings to establish the most direct heirs to certain allotments. Affidavits given at these proceedings sometimes included family history going back several generations. These allotment and heirship or probate records are kept in the National Archives and include names and dates that may provide clues in the search. For a further description of archival holdings, see National Archives and Records Administration resources listed below.

Since many American Indians chose to leave reservations long ago, they simply are not listed on tribal rolls. In these cases, other resources may need to be located. Some reservations or regional offices of Indian affairs kept "Public Domain Indian Censuses" or "4th Section Allotment Rolls" for Indian individuals or families who remained "off reservation." These rolls are separate from "tribal rolls" and are meant for Indians whom the government considered to have "severed" or "relinquished" tribal affiliations. Special Homestead Law amendments and the 4th Section of the 1887 General Allotment Act made provisions for these non-reservation Indians. They were considered disconnected from their tribes and on their way to early U.S. citizenship.

State and local museums and historical societies may also possess helpful resources. Journals, diaries, and other papers of Indian agents, the agency doctor, or others involved in activities at the reservation in question often end up in other than federal repositories and can sometimes give a more detailed record than the often dry and impersonal agency records. Fur trading post employees and missionaries often kept detailed accounts of things far beyond the scope of inventory and prices.

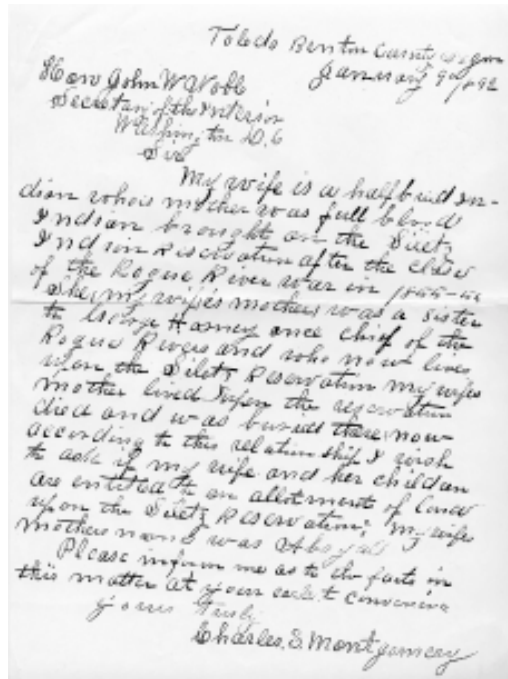


Figure 1: Allotment application written in 1892 requesting land for Melissa Montgomery and revealing her relationship to George Harney.

Toledo, Benton County, Oregon  
January 9th 1892

Hon. John W. Noble  
Secretary of the Interior  
Washington, D.C.

Sir,

My wife (Melissa Montgomery) is a half breed Indian whose mother was full blood Indian brought on the Siletz Indian Reservation after the close of the Rogue river War in 1855-56. She (my wife's mother) was a sister to George Harney once chief of the Rogue Rivers and who now lives upon the Siletz Reservation. My wife's mother lived upon the reservation, died, and was buried there. Now according to this relationship, I wish to ask if my wife and her children are entitled to an allotment of land upon the Siletz reservation. My wife's mother's name was Abigail.

Please inform me as to the facts of this matter at your earliest convenience.

Yours truly,  
Charles E. Montgomery

The Hudson's Bay Company Archives and various church records have cleared up more than a few family mysteries. Micro-filmed newspapers can be useful as well. For example, if a date of death is known, an obituary might have been printed in a local newspaper. Cemeteries and cemetery records can also provide clues. For instance, since I knew where my great uncle was buried, I decided to take a walk in that cemetery. I discovered a large monument marking my great grandmother's grave and was able to determine her date of birth. Until that discovery, I had been unable to locate that information anywhere.

University and college libraries can provide valuable resources. For example, The Valley Library at Oregon State University has the Indian census rolls for the years 1885-1940. Although the data on these rolls vary somewhat, most give the person's English and/or Indian name, roll number, age or date of birth, sex, and relationship to the head of the family. Starting in 1930, the rolls also indicate the degree of Indian





Tombstone of my great grandmother's grave located in Toledo, Oregon:

Melissa  
Wife of  
Charles E. Montgomery  
Born July 15, 1859  
Died Jan. 11 1899

blood as well as other information. (For more details about the Valley Library's holdings, see the resources listed below.)

#### Tribal Enrollment

If a researcher has located information about an American Indian ancestor and wishes to become an enrolled tribal member, he/she will need to contact the tribe's enrollment officer and probably meet blood quantum and possibly other requirements. Since each tribe is an individual entity, requirements for enrollment vary. Perhaps the simplest way to locate this information can be found through the resources located on the Bureau of Indian Affairs Web site. Enrollment criteria are explained and names and addresses are provided for contacting tribal entities. The Native American Nations Web site provides links to various tribes' Web pages. These provide another means of contacting one's tribe.

#### Resources

Locating and gaining access to appropriate resources can be a daunting task. Many institutions are being inundated with requests for genealogical information these days, so researchers must be prepared to be patient and persistent.

#### Bureau of Indian Affairs

To order a packet of information on tracing American Indian ancestry, dial (202) 208-6123. Follow the recorded directions, and the packet should arrive within four to six weeks.

#### Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Family History Centers

Many communities have a family history center connected with this church. These centers are staffed by volunteers who can assist in accessing information held in archives maintained in Salt Lake City. Each center has locality files for each state. For example, to search for Oregon tribes, pull the Oregon locality file and look under

native Americans. This microfilm file contains an index of other documents that can be ordered from Salt Lake City. Once the microfilm records arrive, the particular information sought can be located and copied. The center I visited in Corvallis has both a copy machine and a microfilm viewing station. The locality files also list books that may be helpful. Although these books are not available at the history centers, they may be available through interlibrary loan.

#### National Archives and Records Administration—Pacific Alaska Region (Seattle)

E-mail [seattle.archives@nara.gov](mailto:seattle.archives@nara.gov) or phone (206) 526-6501. A pamphlet entitled *Finding Native American Ancestors* at the National Archives Pacific Alaska Region (Seattle) is available on request. Note that there are regional archives throughout the United States with holdings indigenous to their particular geographic areas. These regional archives can be located and accessed at <http://www.nara.gov/>.

This resource is especially valuable for those tracing ancestry among Northwest Indian tribes. Its holdings include the Indian Census Rolls for 1884–1940. These rolls were compiled annually, and include both tribe and band. Although they are not indexed, once a name is located in a particular year, it can be found in the same relative position on the rolls for other years. The regular national census taken in 1900 and 1910 included a special schedule for Indians. The 1910 records are partially indexed. These records have been soundexed, or phonetically coded, which may prove very helpful. Also available are the land allotment records described above and enrollment records from the Chemawa Indian School located near Salem, Oregon. Note that when having trouble finding a name on older census rolls, checking for spelling variations and name reversals may be necessary. For example, changes such as Strong Bill to William Strong or Depot Charley to Charles DePoe are a very



common practice in Indian Country. Some of these records are on microfilm or indexed on microfilm. Others are original records. At some point, researchers may need to phone or e-mail an archivist at NARA (see above listing) for further assistance. Also, it should be noted that some original records have been neither microfilmed nor copied and can be found only in the Washington, DC NARA.

**The Oregon Historical Society at the Oregon History Center—Portland, Oregon**

The Oregon Historical Society Library in Portland possesses both primary and secondary documents relevant to American Indian genealogical research. The staff is helpful and will assist researchers in locating and accessing the information they seek. Contact the society by phone at (503) 222-1741.

**Internet Sources**

Web sites found through Internet searches can provide up-to-the-minute information. Some are incomplete, inaccurate, infrequently updated, or difficult to navigate. Others provide valuable information and are well worth a look.

**Broken Threads**

<http://homepages.rootsweb.com/~snowdawn/>

Advice for those researching American Indian roots is provided. Also included are over a hundred links to other sites.

**Bureau of Indian Affairs**

<http://www.doi.gov/bia/ancestry/index.htm>

This government source provides a guide to tracing American Indian ancestry. This comprehensive site contains links to information about ancestry and genealogical research. A link for those of Cherokee ancestry is included as well as information about the Dawes rolls. A general description of the enrollment process in a federally recognized tribe is also provided.

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints-History Center**

<http://www.familysearch.org/>

This site describes services available at The Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. It features an interactive genealogy service. When family information is input, it provides links to relevant data.

**National Archives and Records Administration**

<http://www.nara.gov/genealogy/>

This source accesses a catalog of microfilm publications. When the genealogy page is reached, select the online list of microform catalogs and finding aids. From the next screen, select American Indians. Next, select the catalog of NARA microfilm publications. There are eight categories. Probably the most relevant would be those records relating to census rolls and other enrollments. These microfilm documents are available for purchase.

<http://www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html>

This source allows a search of archival holdings. Only those documents that have been digitized can be accessed. For example, the Dawes rolls of the “Five Civilized Nations” are available. Also, copies of enrollment cards for those nations can be accessed.

**Native American Nations**

<http://www.nativeculture.com/lisamitten/nations.html>

This site contains a list of American Indian Nations with links to sites that have either been set up by the nations themselves or are sites devoted to a particular nation. They are in alphabetical order by tribe and include both federally recognized tribes as well as unrecognized tribes.

**Oregon Historical Society**

<http://www.ohs.org/>

When the Society’s home page is reached, click on “Visit the Oregon Historical



1878  
Heads of Families and Individual  
Indians entitled to supplies at  
Siletz Agency Toledo Oregon

Name	Indian Name	English Translation	Family
Bill	Te sue hone	Many Men	3
Scalley	Scal - lee	Dirty Nose	2
Morris	Ghil se	Dry Back	3
Warner	Sut-la-til-us	Sing & Run	6
Santa Lawson	Santa Lawson	same as Flesh	6
Rogue Rivers			
George Harney	Al-hale-y	Forehead with hair	7
Evans Bill	Men ge ena	Killed & alive again	3
James Buchanan	Se-me-sa		2

(1878) Heads of Families and Individual  
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James Buchanan	Se-me-sa		2

Partial census from 1878 listing George Harney, my great-grandmother's uncle.

Society.” Choose “Collections,” and then the “Horizon Online Catalog.” From this location the library’s collections can be searched by author, title, or subject.

**Valley Library Oregon State University**  
<http://osulibrary.orst.edu/research/srg/nativeam.htm>

This site provides information about the Valley Library’s American Indian collection and provides links to other sources as well.

**State Historical Society of Missouri Native American Genealogy**  
<http://www.system.missouri.edu/shs/nativeam.html>

In addition to general instructions for those seeking information on American Indian ancestry, this site includes links to a variety of American Indian genealogy web sites as well as links to Cherokee-specific sites. A list of books and references is also included.


**WWW Virtual Library—American Indians—Index of Native American Genealogy Resources on the Internet**  
<http://www.hanksville.org/NAresources/indices/NAgenealogy.html>

The title of this comprehensive site is an accurate description of what is provided. There are over 50 links to various resources.

**Print Resources**

Although I have not reviewed these references personally, I have included descriptions given by others.

Carpenter, Cecelia Svinth. *How to Research American Indian Blood Lines: A Manual on Indian Genealogical Research*. 1994. 109 pp. Four Winds Indian Books, PO Box 544, York, NE 68467, 1-800-775-3125. This book explains how to get started as well as problems that might be encountered. It describes how to locate information in various records including census, marriage, and death records. Information on tribal registration is also included.

Platle, Ron. *How You Can Trace Your Family Roots*. 1996. 32 pp. Four Winds Indian Books, PO Box 544, York, NE 68467, 1-800-775-3125. This booklet contains forms, sources, guidelines, and procedures for research as well as relevant record keeping. It includes a four-page supplement for those wishing to trace their Indian heritage. 



Lorna Avery Scott was born into a Corvallis pioneer family where she developed a lifelong interest in local history. She taught in Corvallis for thirty-six years and is now retired.

*My own search was brief and successful, since I had the necessary names and knew my tribal identity. For those who lack that knowledge, the search will be much more difficult.*

*In order to provide information to librarians assisting patrons conducting challenging research, I needed to locate sources that would be helpful. I learned many things during this process and could not have obtained this information if it had not been for the generous assistance of the following people. I would like to express my thanks to all of them. My very special thanks go to Robert Kentta who checked and rechecked my statements about tribal history for accuracy and content. His knowledge and support were invaluable to me.*

Judy Juntunen, Assistant Director/Librarian, Benton County Historical Society and Museum, Philomath, Oregon.

Susan H. Karren, Director Archival Operations, National Archives and Records Administration—Pacific Alaska Region, Seattle, Washington.

Robert Kentta, Cultural Resources Director, Confederated Tribes of Siletz, Siletz, Oregon.

Bob Kingston, Catalog Assistant, Oregon Historical Society Library, Portland, Oregon.

Clara Royer, Volunteer, Family History Center, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Corvallis, Oregon.

Joe Toth, Social Science Librarian, Valley Library, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon.

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