

## Researching Indigenous Peoples and Ancestors

### Timeline of Land Ownership:

- **Pre-Contact:** The tribes who lived on the land now called Kentucky included the Shawnee, Cherokee, Chickasaw, and Yuchi.
- **1740s:** European settlers and colonists begin pushing past Appalachian Mountains to settle Kentucky frontier.
- **1751:** Last known indigenous town/trading post, Eskipakithiki, is established in Kentucky.
- **1792:** Kentucky achieves statehood and joins the other states in the forced removal and relocation of the indigenous populations, including Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Muscogee, and Seminole.
- **1805:** Cherokee Nation cedes land South of Cumberland River, the KY counties now known as Bell, Knox, Whitley, and McCreary.
- **1818:** Chickasaw Nation cedes all land in what is now known as the Jackson Purchase, ending government recognition of land held by indigenous peoples in Kentucky.

### Starting Your Research:

Though indigenous people resided within Kentucky, no tribes or reservations were recognized by state or federal government. There was also no state record grouping established and maintained for Native Americans.

Start your search by looking for vital statistic records of your ancestor, including birth, marriage, and death. If too early, family bible records are a possibility. Court case files and adoptions may also provide useful information if you learn this ancestor was adopted, but please note that adoptions require legal permission to be accessed.

#### Terminology:

You may come across various labels and terminology during your research. The 1870 U. S. Census began to describe individuals as “Native American”, but this is not reliable as the census enumerator wrote down what he believed to be their race. As a result, an ancestor may be listed as “White”, “Mulatto”, or “Black”. The use of “I” for Indian is rare. There is also the term “Black Dutch”, which some families would use to refer to indigenous children officially or unofficially adopted as a way of protecting them. During the times of forced removal, officials would investigate families and question the heritage of any children within the home.

### Government Records and Where to Find Them

The only American Indian federal government record at Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives (KDLA) is:

- 1835 Census of Cherokee Indians (Henderson Roll)

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) retains original records and microfilm of the following tribes:

- [Baker Rolls, 1924–1929](#) (Eastern Cherokee)
- [California Indian Judgment Rolls, 1928–1972](#) (Multiples Tribes)
- [Dawes Rolls, 1896–1914](#) (Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole Tribes of Oklahoma)
- [Guion Miller Rolls, 1906–1911](#) (Eastern Cherokee)
- [Indian Census Rolls, 1885–1940](#) (Multiple Agencies and Tribes)
- [Kern-Clifton Roll, January 16, 1897](#) (Cherokee Freedmen)
- [Roblin Roll, 1911–1919](#) (American Indians in Western Washington not enrolled or allotted to an Indian Agency)
- [Revised Copy of the Wallace Roll, ca. 1890–ca.1896](#) (Cherokee Freedmen)

NARA also has annuity records, allotment papers, census records, military forms, among other items of interest for those researching indigenous ancestors (National Archives, 2024). Their website for American Indian research can be found here:

<https://www.archives.gov/research/native-americans>

### Other Sources

Consider any of the following institutions for more information on researching indigenous persons in Kentucky.

- **Kentucky Historical Society (KHS):** KHS has several family genealogy books, including guidebooks on how to research indigenous lineage and where to begin. There are also family bible records kept on-site. Bibles were often used to track marriages, births, and deaths, and may provide information on the ancestor you're researching.
- **Ancestry:** KDLA has an institutional subscription for this database. Ancestry provides a search feature with digitized copies of numerous census records and rolls. This includes Census Records and Cherokee Muster Rolls (1835-1838); Eastern Cherokee Indian Reservation Rolls (1848-1970); Guion Miller Roll (1908-1910); and Wallace Roll of Cherokee Freedmen (1890-1893).
- **FamilySearch:** FamilySearch is a free resource but should be cross-referenced and used with caution due to users having the ability to add, change, and delete people, trees, and records. The site is like Ancestry and provides digitized microfilm rolls of records including marriage, births, deaths, census, etc. depending on the state and county.