

26 June 2001

## **FINDING YOUR “CHEROKEE PRINCESS”: NATIVE AMERICAN (INDIAN) RESEARCH IN THE OLD SOUTH**

by Robert S. Davis, Jr.

Just as seemingly every American family history begins with a tale of three emigrant brothers, so many southern families claim a female Cherokee ancestor, sometimes as the basis for some misguided belief that federal funds will be forthcoming to anyone with Indian blood. If you have such a story passed down to you, please keep in mind, “Bob Davis’s Rule of Red, White, and Black”: Even if you do have Indian ancestors you probably will not be able to document it and that many white and black ancestors are mistakenly remembered in family traditions as having been Indians. Many family stories remember female ancestors as Cherokees, when in fact the Indian ancestors were much further back in their ancestry and were from coastal tribes of North Carolina and Virginia. For example, all of the descendants of the famous Pocahontus of Virginia (a Powhatan Indian) only come down from her one grandchild, however, those descendants today number more than one million persons! Within the narrow gene pool of southerners, theoretically millions of southerners would descend from however many—or few—Indian/White relationships actually existed. Federal census records did not officially list Indians as a separate race until 1870 and many census records list persons of Indian ancestry as white or black, or omit them from the census altogether.

While few records survive of the members of these early tribes, a number of sources do survive to document Cherokee Indian heritage, real or imagined. Basic guides to Native American research include Jessie Carney Smith, Ethic Genealogy (1983), 209-38; Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives (1985), pp. 159-70; American Indians: A Select Catalog of National Archives Microfilm Publications (1981); Edward B. Hill, Guide to Records in the National Archives of the United States Relating to American Indians (1981); and Tony Mack McClure, Cherokee Proud: A Guide for Tracing and Honoring Your Cherokee Ancestors (1996).

For the person who sets out to explore possible Cherokee heritage, a number of well indexed sources have been published, many in recent years. To best use, these materials, however, the researcher would best begin by ignoring the Indian stories and do as much research as possible on the names of family members. Only when you reach a dead end, should you then take your findings to see if you can “relate” to the Cherokees. Don Shadburn, Charles O. Walker, and Sharron Ashton have and continue to publish such Native American records.

Often finding your Indian roots begins by finding your white ancestors living among the Indians. Many special Cherokee sources can help. The works for the earliest such records for southern Indians are the volumes on the South Carolina Indian trade, specifically Dorothy Potter, for example, includes a 1794 list of the white population of the Cherokee nation in her Passports of Southeastern Pioneers, p. and list of Cherokee families granted the legal rights of whites by the Georgia legislature appears on page of A Guide to Native American (Indian) Sources at the

26 June 2001

Georgia Department of Archives and History, Mary B. Warren has done a book of such records for Georgia, 1819-1838 as Whites Among the Cherokees

We also have several books on Indian relics and place names, found on the shelf at or near E 77 though E 99. We have on microfilm (microfilm drawer one) several early rolls (censuses) of the Cherokees and in book form David Keith Hampton, Cherokee Old Settlers: the 1896 Old Settler Payroll and the 1851 Old Settler Payroll (1993). The indexes to the Cherokee rolls appear in book form as Bob Blankenship, Cherokee Roots (1978). We also have the indexed 1832 Parsons and Abbott roll of the Creeks on microfilm. The Anniston Public Library has a larger collection of Creek Indian records on microfilm.

Many researchers find their princesses, not among the Cherokees but among other contemporary tribes. For information on Creek Indian research see the last part of Billie Ford Snider, Full Name Indexes Eastern Creek Indians (1993) and the Choctaws receive coverage in Betty C. Whitshire, Register of Choctaw Emigrants to the West 1831 and 1832 (1993). We have the records of the Choctaw Nation vs. the United States on microfilm and claims filed by Creek orphans of their removal in the late 1800s.

For whites with the Indians, we have on microfilm the indexed "Cherokee Indian Letters" and "Creek Indian letters" of the Georgia Department of Archives and History.; and Emmett Starr's Cherokee genealogies. In our Georgia Indians vertical file, we have includes a list of Indian families that remained in Georgia after 1838. We have many issues of Southeastern Native American Exchange.

On microfilm we have the genealogically rich indexes and claim papers of some 400,000 southerners claiming Cherokee ancestry in suing the Federal government over the trail of tears (the Guion Miller Claims), 1906-1910. In book form, we have an index to these claims and the incomplete abstracts by Jerry Wright Jordan known as Cherokee By Blood.

We also have on microfilm the Final Roll of the Five Civilized Tribes and indexes to the same in book form and microfilm. This record was prepared by the Dawes Commission and only concerns persons with Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole ancestors in Oklahoma around 1900. Most of the people living in the Indian Territory of Oklahoma, formerly part of the Arkansas territory, were white. We also have on microfilm indexes to letters that the Dawes Commission received. For more information see our handout on using the Dawes material and Kent Carter, "Deciding Who Can Be Cherokee," The Chronicles of Oklahoma 69 (1991) (2): 174-205, a copy of which is in our "Indians" vertical file; and Kent Carter, The Dawes Commission and the Allotment of the Five Civilized Tribes, 1893-1914 (1999). For copies of Dawes records or to check for petitions filed by ancestors attempting citizenship in the Indian nations before 1900 write to National Archives Southwest Region, P. O. Box 6216, Fort Worth, TX 76115. We have in book form the index to genealogically valuable memorandums of the Dawes Commission and an index to petitions for Indian citizenship in the Northern Circuit federal Court (of Oklahoma?). Our book collection contains a number of books of marriages and other records of the Oklahoma Cherokees. The United States and Canada International Genealogical Index (IGI) includes Indians on its cd-rom disks, in our collection.

26 June 2001

In 1887, the Congress of the United States passed the first law to begin the process to redistribute lands in Oklahoma to Oklahoma Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole Indian families. The Dawes Commission, headed by Henry Laurens Dawes, between 1898 and 1914, made the determinations of eligibility for the lands. Ultimately they received applications for some 250,000 but only accepted as eligible some 101,000 people. The genealogical information of these persons is extensive. For more information on these records see Thomas G. Mooney, Exploring Your Cherokee Ancestry: a Basic Genealogical Research Guide, pp. 21-6, a book shelved at E 99 .C5 M66. For historical background see Kent Carter, "Deciding Who Can Be Cherokee: Enrollment Records of the Dawes Commission," Chronicles of Oklahoma 69 (1991): 174-205 in our "Indians" vertical file.

If the family you seek was Cherokee you may be able to save some time by consulting Bob Blankenship, Dawes Roll "Plus" of Cherokee Nation "1898" on top of our microfilm cabinet. This index is arranged alphabetically only by the first three letters of each surname. The "Dawes Roll Number" in the index refers you to the Cherokee roll of National Archives microfilm T529 Final Roll of the Five Civilized Tribes in our microfilm drawer MFM 1. The "Census" number refers you to their application in National Archives Microfilm M1301 (our drawer MFM 3 through MFM 4) and the summary cards based upon those applications in M1186 (our drawer MFM 1). If only a number appears under "Card" this refers to "Cherokees by Blood" in the above microfilms. For numbers that begin with alphabetical letters see the introduction to the Blankenship book. The Blankenship book also refers to Cherokee families filing genealogically valuable claims for money with the Guion Miller Commission. The application numbers are listed under "MILLERA." The applications, National Archives microfilm M1106, are in our microfilm drawers MFM 5 through 9. Also see the two indexes bound together in Bob Blankenship, Guion Miller Roll "Plus" (kept on top of our microfilm cabinets) and the volumes so far in Jerry Wright Jordan, Cherokee By Blood (shelved at E 99 .C5 J67).

The Dawes records are arranged by tribe and then group:

- Citizens by Blood
- Citizens by Marriage
- New Born Citizens by Blood (Act of 1905)
- Minor Citizens by Blood (Act of 1906)
- Freedmen (former slaves [or descendants] of Indians)
- New Born Freedmen
- Minor Freedmen
- Delaware Indians accepted into the Cherokees

These groups are further sub-divided into applicants accepted (given a number with no alphabetical prefix), applicants rejected (given a number preceded with the letter "R"), and applicants whose claims were considered doubtful (given a number preceded with a "D"; eventually each of the doubtful claims was either redesignated as accepted or rejected.) The National Archives Southwest Region has a data base index of rejected and doubtful claims. These names are at least partially on the internet (see below).

If you are searching the accepted Dawes claims you need to begin with the index on roll one of National Archives microfilm M1186 Final Roll of the Five Civilized Tribes in our drawer MFM 1.

26 June 2001

It is arranged by tribal groups, such as "Cherokee Intermarried White," "Creek Newborn," "Chickasaw Freedmen Minor," etc. Within each group, the names are arranged alphabetically by the first three letters of the last name or surname. Surnames beginning with "Mc," such as McDonald, come after all other surnames that begin with the letter M.

This index refers you to the numbers used by tribal group in National Archives microfilm T529, the Final Roll of the Five Civilized Tribes, in our drawer MFM 1. Once you have found the family on the final roll, notice the "Census Card No." This number is the "Field No." used in the genealogically valuable applications in National Archives microfilm M1301 Applications for Enrollment of the Commission to the Five Civilized Tribes 1898-1914, in our drawers MFM 2 through 4, and in M1186 Five Civilized Tribes Enrollment Cards (compiled from the applications but with notes added cross referencing the applications) in our drawer MFM 1 and MFM 2.

We have many other Native American resources in our collections. See our handout. Some additional records relating to the Dawes Commission include the indexes to correspondence received by the Dawes Commission, M1314, in our drawer MFM 4; Index to Creek appeals in our drawer MFM 4; and the incomplete index to Cherokee applications rejected by the Dawes Commission in our drawer MFM 1.

The original records of the Dawes Commission are today in the National Archives Southwest Region, P. O. Box 6216, Fort Worth, TX 76115 where volunteers are currently working on a more comprehensive index to these materials. Part of the new index is now available on the Internet at: [www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html](http://www.nara.gov/nara/nail.html). The NASR also has many related records such as the petitions to federal court for Indian citizenship in the Indian territories.