

Do you have Native American Ancestry?

Genealogy Tips for Researching Native American
Ancestors

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Genealogy Research

Here are some tips on researching your native ancestors:

- 1) Start at the end: That is, gather all the information you can within your family members, starting with your parents, grandparents and so on. Talk to the older members of your family and find out what they remember. Search out old family Bibles or other documents such as birth or marriage certificates. If you think you have a native ancestor, the most important things you need are names and, if possible, the dates of their births and deaths, where they lived, what they did for a living and so on.
- 2) Then turn to local resources, such as your local library or historical society to see what kind of documents they might have that might mention your family members. Or check out the county courthouse to see what records they have on file; an example would be records of property transfers. Find out where your relatives are buried and visit the graves; sometimes useful information can be found on headstones.
- 3) Check out the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg. The State Archives collects a wide array of materials including church records and county records. You might want to obtain a copy of Robert Dructor's Guide to Genealogical Sources at the Pennsylvania State Archives (1998, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission). This book catalogs the materials available through 1998.
- 4) Search U.S. Census records: However, this source may not be very helpful, since the U.S. Census made no effort to record all Native Americans in the country until 1890. From 1790 to 1860, the Census counted Native Americans as mulattos.
- 5) Go online: An increasing number of resources are available online to help you check for native ancestors. A good starting point is Carolyne's Genealogy Helper at <http://www.angelfire.com/tx/carolynegealogy/>. This site provides links to many other sites that help people find their native ancestry as well as a number of helpful hints in terms of how to search and what to search for.

Searching for native ancestors in Pennsylvania is particularly difficult because most contacts between Europeans and PA's Native Americans took place so early (1630-1765). While most history texts agree that intermarriage between Europeans and Native Americans took place from the earliest interactions, the usual marriage was between a European man and a native woman. Since women did not have much status in colonial society, these marriages are easily overlooked or not recorded in colonial sources. Some researchers note that if a marriage certificate from the 18th or 19th century does not record the woman's last name, the chances are good that she was a Native American. Also, because of colonial, state and federal policies towards Native Americans, many chose to deliberately hide their native backgrounds for fear of discrimination.