

## **Cherokee Research**

In this article we discuss researching the Cherokee genealogy. Researching Native American history can be difficult, but it is very rewarding in the end. There are also several new resources that can help with your Cherokee genealogy.

If you have any comments or suggestions, please email me at [jimd@mountainpress.com](mailto:jimd@mountainpress.com).

Thank you,

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When one suspects they have Cherokee blood in their back ground, the first thing I usually hear is that they are descendant from a Cherokee Princess. It is always interesting when I hear that since there were not any "Cherokee Princesses". The females might have been the daughter of a chief, but that does not make them a Princess. This point aside, many do trace some part of their ancestry back to the Native Americans. Tracing Native American history involves unique approaches with a total different way of thinking.

First, the normal routes do not work for this research. The Native Americans did not keep the same type of records since there was not a centralized form of government. It was not until they began interacting with the settlers that records began to be available. Normally, from about 1800 upwards there are records that give some kind of details for the heritage of the Native American.

Second, when researching your Native American background, you have to rely on the government records of rolls and removal records generated over a long period of time. Once you have exhausted the various rolls over the 100 years of their recording and once you have exhausted the removal records, where do you go? A lot of material has surfaced in recent years that has shed light on much of the Native American background. Much of

the official records for most of the American tribes are kept at the Oklahoma Historical Society library in Oklahoma City. They have been designated as the repository for the official records of the majority of the tribes in the states.

With regard to the Cherokee, the largest of the Native American tribes even today, there are some materials available today for the first time. These will prove to be extremely valuable both in the case of names and relationships, but also in a deeper understanding of their culture and life style. The older of the two is a collection of materials "The Brainerd Journal - A Mission to the Cherokees, 1817-1823" published by the University of Nebraska Press in 1998. These are the records of Cherokee missionaries sent out by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, an interdenominational group made up largely of Presbyterians and Congregationalist. In 1801 when Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs became the United States Agent to the Cherokee, he encouraged Gideon Blackburn, a Presbyterian Minister, out of Maryville, Tennessee to start a school for the Cherokee which led eventually to the Brainerd Mission in the Chattanooga area of the country. This volume gives a lot of details on the relation of the children that attended the school with links to their parents. This kind of information is hard to find for this early period. This book is available on Amazon if you would like to purchase it.

The second vitally new resource is a five volume series "Records of the Moravian Among the Cherokee" covering in great detail the years from 1752 until 1821. The Moravian records have long been sought after, but very difficult to access. Many of the writings are still in the original German and housed in the Archives at Salem, North Carolina where access is very limited. Only 3 of the 5 volumes are currently available on Amazon, but they are taking pre-orders for the 4th volume. The real value of these volumes is the details of daily life of the missionaries with the Cherokee and those around them, both white and Indian. You hear words in these volumes that are firsthand accounts of interaction between the two groups.

The details of the travel of the Missionaries makes you feel that you are walking along side them as they moved from Salem in North Carolina to the backwoods of Tennessee. Having lived most of my life along this same path, I knew there they were going and with whom they were meeting each day. All up and down southwestern Virginia and eastern Tennessee, you get a personal experience of daily life in these areas. For some reason, the Missionaries did not travel through western North Carolina and eastern Georgia until later in the work of the mission.

The Cherokee National Press is to be commended for their efforts in bringing this series to light after so many years. In time to come, these five volumes will become the number one classic for all work with the Cherokee.

Researching Native American genealogy is a long and arduous task, but the rewards are well worth the time and effort.

Happy Hunting!

### **Recommended Reference Books**

- **Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs Day Book Number 2**
- **General Wool's Cherokee Removal Records**
- **Volunteer Soldiers in the Cherokee War 1836-1839**
- **Robert Armstrong's Survey Book of Cherokee Lands**
- **Cherokee Ration Books 1836-1838 - New Echota [Georgia]**
- **Memoir of Catharine Brown**