

Oklahoma History

Oklahoma's background, formation, and organization are unique among the states. Developed out of "Indian Territory" (a name originating in the 1830s) and Oklahoma Territory (created in 1890), numerous jurisdictional and boundary changes are part of the state's history.

As early as 1804, efforts were made to negotiate the removal of southeastern tribes to west of the Mississippi River. The period of largest removal occurred between 1825 and 1842 when the federal government forced relocation to what eventually became western Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma. The region was established as a home, "as long as the grass shall grow and rivers run," for the Five Civilized Tribes (Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole), who were displaced from their previous homes in the south and southeast by the U.S. government and its citizens. The routes traveled became known as the "Trail of Tears" because of the grief and loss experienced by Native Americans during their journey.

When the United States acquired the Republic of Texas in 1845, what would later become Oklahoma's panhandle ostensibly belonged to Texas. In 1850 Congress purchased the panhandle strip, but this "No Man's Land" remained separate from Indian Territory or any other territory or state. During the 1850s, railway companies pressured the government to open the unassigned lands in the panhandle strip, and in 1854 Congress confined Indian Territory only to present-day Oklahoma, excluding the panhandle strip.

During the Civil War internal dissension among the tribes arose as some members served the Union, while others supported the Confederate cause, and still others tried to stay neutral. A much larger percentage favored the Confederate cause, and the Five Civilized Tribes officially supported the Confederacy.

In 1872 the first railroad was established through the area connecting Missouri, Kansas, and Texas. Indian Territory was called "the promised land" as it offered fine grazing land and the possibility of free land. Major trails such as the Chisholm, Great Western, East Shawnee, West Shawnee, Couch, Payne, and Plummer ran between cattle land in Texas and grazing and farmland in Kansas.

By 1900 Oklahoma Territory had burgeoned to encompass more than the western half of the present state, while Indian Territory was dwindling to a smaller part of the eastern section. Greer County, formerly under Texas jurisdiction, became legally attached to Oklahoma Territory in 1896. In June 1906 Congress provided for the admission of Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory to the Union as one state, if both nonnatives and natives approved. On 16 November 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed Oklahoma the forty-sixth state. Oklahoma City supplanted Guthrie as the capital in 1910.

The state's population of residents with Native American heritage remains one of the highest in the United States. The dual history of native relocation and nonnative settlement remains important in the use of records kept for genealogical research.

This section is from [History of Oklahoma in the Ancestry.com Wiki](#), and was originally published in [Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources](#).

Oklahoma State Research Guide

Family History Sources in the Sooner State



State Census Records

Residents of Indian Territory other than Native Americans were enumerated in the federal census of 1860 in the schedules for "Indian Lands."

The first federal census for Oklahoma was taken in 1890, but the records were lost when the census was destroyed by fire. A special territory-sponsored census was taken in June 1890 for the seven territorial counties, including Beaver, Canadian, Cleveland, Kingfisher, Logan, Oklahoma, and Payne. The Cherokee Nation took its own censuses in 1880 and 1890. Originals are at the Indian Archives, where microfilm copies are available for sale but not for interlibrary loan.

Federal census records for Oklahoma begin in 1900, when the present-day state was divided into Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory. The enumerations for both Oklahoma and Indian territories are on separate microfilm reels, and are enumerated in separate districts in the 1900 U.S. census on Ancestry.com. The area called "Oklahoma" includes only the Oklahoma Territory counties, Oklahoma Territory Indian Reservation, and military and naval jurisdictions. The 1900 census for Indian Territory is grouped separately in microfilm reels following the territories.

In addition, a 1907 census of Seminole County is available.

Related Censuses Available on Ancestry.com:

- [U.S., Native American Citizens and Freedmen of Five Civilized Tribes, 1895-1914](#)
- [Oklahoma, Territorial Census, 1890 and 1907](#)
- [Oklahoma Osage Tribe Roll, 1921](#)

<i>Population</i>	
1890	258,657
1900	790,391
1910	1,657,155
1920	2,028,283
1930	2,396,040
1940	2,336,434
1950	2,233,351
1960	2,328,284
1970	2,559,229
1980	3,025,290
1990	3,145,585
2000	3,450,654
2010	3,751,351

Oklahoma Vital Records

Statewide recording of births and deaths for Oklahoma began in October 1908, although compliance was incomplete for as long as two decades. Registration was required in 1917, but it was another ten years before 90 percent compliance was achieved.

- [Oklahoma State Department of Health](#): Holds records of births and deaths from November 1908. For marriage records, contact the county where the marriage was registered.

State Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Web: Oklahoma, Oklahoman Obituary Index, 1972-2012](#)
- [Oklahoma, Select Marriages, 1870-1930](#)

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Other Collections

- [Oklahoma, Naturalization Records, 1889-1991](#)
- [U.S., Citizenship Case Files in Indian Territory, 1896-1897](#)
- [Web: Oklahoma, Confederate Pension Index, 1915-1955](#)
- [U.S., Alien Draft Registrations, Selected States, 1940-1946](#)
- [U.S., Indexed Early Land Ownership and Township Plats, 1785-1898](#)
- [U.S., Native American Applications for Enrollment in Five Civilized Tribes, 1898-1914](#)
- [U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989](#) (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)

Other State Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about Oklahoma history and genealogy. In addition to these state-level resources, many counties and towns maintain important genealogical collections in local libraries, genealogical societies, or historical societies, so check for a local resource when researching.

- [Oklahoma Historical Society \(OHS\)](#): See the [genealogical resources page](#) for an overview of the extensive collections in the OHS Research Center.
- [Oklahoma State Archives](#): The [Collections](#) page contains a list of resources that are helpful to genealogists and researchers.
- [Oklahoma State Library](#)
- [Oklahoma Genealogical Society](#)
- [Oklahoma GenWeb](#)
- [University of Oklahoma Digital Collections](#)
- [The National Archives at Fort Worth](#): This facility maintains records from Federal agencies and courts in Oklahoma, including census, military, court, naturalization, and immigration records.
- [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) General Land Office Records](#): The BLM administers Federal Land for public land states including Oklahoma, and maintains records of land patents which granted land from the Federal Government to individuals. Use the Land Patent Search to locate land grants by name. Many record images are available on the web site. See the FAQ for more information on how to locate and use land patents.

Help and Advice

- [Oklahoma Family History Research](#)
- [Counties of Oklahoma](#)

View all Oklahoma collections on Ancestry.com

Significant Dates (through 1930)

- 1803** – The United States acquired most of present day Oklahoma via the Louisiana Purchase; all inhabitants other than Native Americans receive full citizenship.
- 1812** – Present day Oklahoma became part of the Missouri Territory.
- 1819** – Oklahoma became part of the Arkansas Territory.
- 1821** – Spain ceded to Mexico land that would later become part of Texas and then Oklahoma.
- 1832** – Many members of what were known as the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole) are forced to migrate to what was then Indian Territory.
- 1845** – Texas was annexed by the United States; what would become the panhandle of Oklahoma was part of Texas.
- 1850** – The panhandle of Oklahoma became an unattached territory of the United States.
- 1854** – The Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee, and Seminole Nations formed a federation.
- 1860s** – Because Native Americans had sided with the Confederacy they were forced to forfeit their some of their land.
- 1870s** – Twenty-five other Native American tribes were forced to migrate to Oklahoma.
- 1870** – The Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad began laying its tracks into the Indian Territory.
- 1872** – The railroad crossed the state opening up commerce when the Atlantic and Pacific Railway was built joining with the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad at Vinita.
- 1875** – General George Custer defeated Native Americans tribes at Battle of Washita, mostly ending the Indian Wars; first cattle ranches were established in Western Indian Territory.
- 1889** – The United States opened upland that had not already been assigned and thousands of new settlers came into the state.
- 1890** – Organized as the Oklahoma Territory, a portion of state was under the jurisdiction of Arkansas.
- 1893** – Cherokee outlet lands were opened for settlers; tribal governments were disbanded by the Dawes Commission.
- 1898** – Many men from Oklahoma and the Indian Territory were called to serve in the Spanish-American War.
- 1901** – Gas and oil were discovered in the vicinity of Tulsa and other towns that were part of the Creek Nation; Congress passes the Five Civilized Tribes Citizenship Act.
- 1906** – Oklahoma and Indian Territories were combined.
- 1907** – Oklahoma became the 46th state on November 16, 1907; marriage and divorces records were recorded by clerk of the county.
- 1908** – Statewide recording of births and deaths began in October 1908, although compliance did not happen completely for a few years.
- 1918** – Women in the state received complete suffrage.
- 1924** – Native Americans became United States citizen; prior to this they had been considered citizens of their tribes.
- 1930s** – Severe drought and the Great Depression ruined most of Oklahoma's farmers in what was known as the Dust Bowl Era.