

The American Indian Archives at the Oklahoma Historical Society

Robert Henry: Hello, I'm Robert Henry, chief judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the Tenth Circuit. Welcome to the Oklahoma Historical Society Research Center, located at the Oklahoma History Center. An architectural masterpiece, the Oklahoma History Center is an 18-acre, 215,000-square-foot learning center exploring Oklahoma's unique history of geology, transportation, commerce, culture, aviation, heritage, and more. In addition to the museum galleries, event space, and classrooms, the Oklahoma History Center is home of the John and Eleanor Kirkpatrick Research Center. The Research Center is the point of access for historic research on many topics. The archive collections include 6,000 oral histories, 15,000 historic maps, 8 million photographs, 12 million linear feet of film and video, 9 million pages of documents, and numerous newspapers on microfilm. The crown jewel of the Research Center is the Indian Archives collection, encompassing 3.5 million documents and 6,000 volumes.

The Oklahoma Historical Society's efforts to collect tribal records began as early as 1902. In 1927, Grant Foreman, an attorney from Muskogee, Oklahoma and prominent historian on Indian removal in Oklahoma history, offered a resolution to the Oklahoma Historical Society Board of Directors suggesting they secure the records of the tribes residing in Oklahoma from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Copies of this resolution were distributed to the Congressional delegation for its support. The board agreed to the resolution, and after inventory work had been completed on the documents and a fire proof building was constructed to house the records, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed legislation on March 24, 1934. Public Law 133 HR 5631 was enacted by Congress. This granted the Oklahoma Historical Society custody of certain records of the five tribes and agency records of other tribes in the state of Oklahoma for preservation and research.

The Indian Archives include records from numerous tribes, originating from the offices of Indian agents in Anadarko, Concho, Shawnee, Miami, and Pawnee. The Indian Archives span the years of 1838 to 1933 and cover a number of topics, including tribal roles, tribal government operations, courts, citizenship, elections, property, federal relations, minerals, education, census, Dawes Commission, allotment, land records, and Indian schools.

Access to the Indian Archives is free and open to the public. The records are searchable via the Research Center's online catalog and by a card catalog in the library. Many of the documents and ledgers have been microfilmed for preservation and ease of use. The Oklahoma History Center is located on the northeast corner of N.E. 23rd and Lincoln Boulevard, across the street from the Governor's Mansion. Hours are Monday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.

Since the opening of the Indian Archives on November 28, 1934, thousands of people, including tribal members, tribal attorneys, US government officials, historians, anthropologists, linguists, genealogists, and scholars have utilized the vast resources contained in the collection. The Indian Archives continue to serve the community as a rich source of information on the people, places, and events that shaped our state.