

Great Grandma was a Full Blooded Cherokee Princess ~ Now What????

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So you've become interested in your family heritage and someone told you that your great-grandmother was a full blooded Cherokee princess. You find this quite interesting of course, and would like to find out more. But where do you turn, what do you do, and can DNA testing help you? Let's look at your options one at a time.

First, let's just be honest here. Your great-grandmother was probably NOT a full blooded Cherokee Princess. I've heard this story thousands of times - even in my own family - and it's simply not true. There are two reasons it's not true - but don't give up - keep reading - there's light at the end of the tunnel!

Reason 1 - The Cherokee didn't have princesses.

Reason 2 - Unless your great-grandmother was living on the Cherokee Reservation in either Oklahoma or North Carolina, she probably wasn't full blooded. The Cherokee east of the Mississippi were relocated in the 1830s in the ordeal known as the Trail of Tears. You can read more about that at this link - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trail_of_Tears and here http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cherokee_removal. A census was taken at that time, and even then, few Cherokee were "full-blooded". Many were admixed with mostly European traders, but a few with African Americans as well.

The Cherokee who were allowed to remain east of the Mississippi were already living outside of the reservation, were citizens of the states in which they lived and owned land, living mostly as Europeans, not Native people. Most were Native women married to white men. Today they form the Eastern Band of the Cherokee and mostly descend from people on the original Baker Roll. You can search the Baker Roll here - <http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/baker.php>.

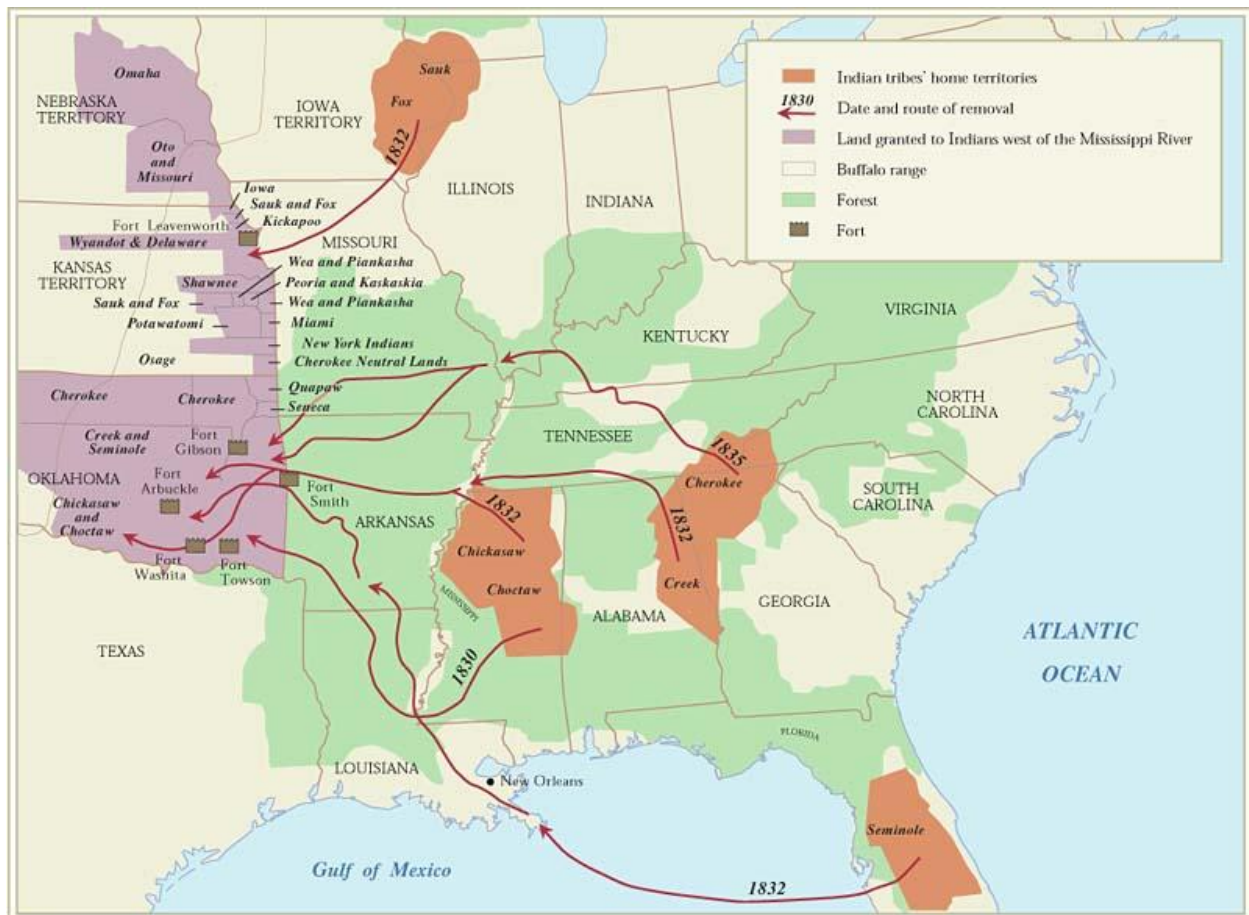
Given a generation length of 25-30 years on the average, the Cherokee removal was between 6 and 7 generations ago. If your ancestor was full blooded at that time, and IF they married a full-blooded white person for every generation since, you would be 1/64th Cherokee and great-grandma would have been 1/8th. Of course, there are a lot of IFs in that statement.

Now, the good news. Many times, where there is smoke, there is fire. If your family carries the oral history that you have some Native ancestry, you probably do. These stories tend to become exaggerated over time and also tend to lose track of the correct generation.

Let's talk about some things you can do to discover your Native heritage.

1. The census is your friend. Thankfully, the census has been indexed and is available online. Some years are available free by using Heritage Quest, available though most libraries via the internet with a library card. Check with your local library. Personally, I use Ancestry.com but it requires a subscription for most years. In the census, if your ancestor was of mixed heritage and it was visible, they may be noted as mulatto in the census. There were only three categories, black, white and mulatto. In this context, mulatto meant mixed. Find them in every census available. The census began in 1790 and in most places, the census is available every 10 years, except for 1890 which was destroyed. Sometimes their ethnic designation changed from census to census and even one mulatto finding is a significant hint. Check their siblings too.

2. Where did they live? The census will tell you not only where they lived, but where they were born and where their parents were born. Often you can track the family back in time. If your ancestors were Cherokee, they would have been living where the Cherokee tribe was located. On the map below, you can see where the Cherokee and other tribes were found before removal in the 1830s.¹



3. The word Cherokee has become generic, like the word Kleenex. Many people who descend from now defunct tribes have lost their tribal name. The Cherokee are the best

¹ <http://mapoftheunitedstates.wordpress.com/2008/04/08/trail-of-tears-map/>

known tribe east of the Mississippi, and therefore many families have assumed for years that the Cherokee were their ancestors, when they were not. In the 1600s, 1700s and 1800s, many tribes were nearly decimated and their remnant people joined together. You can read about this in my paper titled [Where Have All the Indians Gone? Native American Eastern Seaboard Dispersal, Genealogy and DNA in Relation to Sir Walter Raleigh's Lost Colony of Roanoke](#). This paper is available free on my website, but was originally published in the Journal of Genetic Genealogy. It discusses the various tribes, their locations as well as their fates at length.

4. There are Native resources you can check. There were several rolls taken beginning in 1817 and ending in 1924. You can see them at this link - <http://www.tngenweb.org/tnfirst/rolls.html>. The most famous and useful are the Dawes Rolls and the Guion Miller Roll, both of which are used to document tribal heritage and at that time, enrollment in the tribe. You can search the final rolls index for free at this link - <http://www.accessgenealogy.com/native/finalindex.php>. Many legitimate Cherokee enrolled, and many families with a history of Native heritage attempted to enroll as well. Most were declined because even then, they could not prove their connection to the Cherokee. However, if one of your family members, or their siblings, or cousins attempted to enroll, the application is chocked full of genealogy information. These applications are the Holy Grail of Native American genealogy research. Notice on the bottom of this page that you can also search other rolls as well. You can also search at www.footnote.com using the collection title "Dawes Packets".

5. You can engage others to help you in your search. A company called Cherokee Roots has published a significant amount of information in book format and will also assist you in your search. You can see their products and services here - <http://www.cherokeeroots.com/>.

How Can DNA Testing Help?

DNA testing can help you in a number of ways, depending on who is available to test.

There are three kinds of DNA testing for genealogy. All three test different parts of the human DNA and for different genealogy reasons.

A white paper is available that explains this at <http://www.dnaexplain.com/Publications/Publications.asp> titled DNA Testing For Genealogy: The Basics.

The first type of DNA testing is Y chromosomal testing. Men given their Y chromosome to their sons, which is what makes them male. Women don't have a Y chromosome, so they can't contribute any part of it to their sons. Therefore, the father's Y chromosome is passed intact to his sons. He inherited the same chromosome from his father, and his father from his grandfather, on up the paternal tree, which fortunately matches the surname. Therefore, men can test their Y chromosome to see if they match another man of the same surname to see if they share a common ancestor.

Based on the results, men are grouped together in larger groups called haplogroups, and there are two Native American haplogroups that men fall into. This identifies them as Native American. In our situation with great-grandma, this won't work, because she did not have a Y chromosome. However, if you know who great-grandma's father was, you can test his male descendants (of the same surname) today to see if maybe great-grandma's Native ancestry came from her father.

The second type of DNA testing is mitochondrial DNA testing. Women give their mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) to both sexes of their children, but only the women pass it on. Men do not contribute their mitochondrial DNA to their children. Therefore, in the current generation, men and women can both test, but when testing ancestors, the person to test today must be descended from the woman in question through all females to the current generation. In our case, if you are descended from great-grandma only through females, meaning your mother, and her mother, then you can personally test to see if great-grandma was Native through her mother. Like with men, women's results are grouped together in haplogroups and your haplogroup will tell if your maternal ancestor was Native on her mother's side.

If you are unlucky and you don't descend from great-grandma through all females, meaning she is your father's grandmother, for example - you're still not out of luck. Find someone who descends from her through all females and ask them to test. If she has a son left living, he can test as well. What if she had no female children who had female children or sons left living? Then move up the tree a generation to her mother and see if she had any female children who had female children.

The third type of testing is called autosomal testing. It tests all of your DNA and one of the results is a percentage of ethnicity. This tells you how much of 7 basic worldwide groups you are, including Native American. This test is quite accurate back about 5 generations and beyond that, can sometimes pick up minority ancestry. Even 1% is enough to confirm the oral history as accurate. Looking at your family tree - if your Cherokee ancestor was 5 generations back in time, you would be 3.12% Cherokee. If your Cherokee ancestor was really great-grandma and she was full blooded, you would be 12.5%, which is plenty to be detected using autosomal testing.

There are differing types of DNA tests for genealogy and various quality factors. I strongly recommend that you use Family Tree DNA for testing purposes for a number of reasons. First, they don't "guess" at your haplogroup, they test. Other firms attempt to extrapolate, and many times, incorrectly. Second, they have the largest data base for comparison to others who have tested - and you may well find cousins you didn't even know you had. Third, they have projects you can join, for free, and obtain discounts if you order your tests through projects. Projects can be surname projects or projects such as those focused on Native Americans - and you can join an unlimited number. Each project has an administrator who is a volunteer, but generally very helpful. Lastly, they are one of only two firms to use the latest technology for autosomal testing (as of 2011) which tests over half a million autosomal locations. You just can't do the ethnicity

predictions accurately with only a few locations. Some firms try to do them with as few as 15 and 21, as compared to half a million.

The tests can be ordered at www.familytreedna.com and they are the Yline test for males, the mitochondrial test for female ancestors and the Family Finder tests for ethnicity percentages. After your testing is complete, if you want more information about the DNA results and an heirloom report, you can also order a Personalized DNA report, either at Family Tree DNA or at <http://www.dnaxplain.com/shop/features.aspx>.

Enjoy your search for your family!!! It's a journey you'll never regret.