

Membership Enrollment Narrative

Our membership roll is comprised primarily of descendants of the families whose leaders were identified in the treaties that we made with three nation states, Spain, Mexico and the United States. As Apache people, we have relied on oral histories and word of mouth to keep records since time immemorial. We did not have written enrollment rolls prior to the Spanish era. Lists of the Mimbres Bands of Gila Apache consist primarily of rations lists at Peace Establishments during the two Spanish-speaking eras and ration lists during the United States era.

Records of Indian Agents are generally unreliable with the exception of Dr. Michael Steck, who kept voluminous records of his dispatches to his superiors and of the distribution of rations and supplies allocated to our ancestral families in the names of their headmen and female leaders. However, occasionally military commanders were requested to conduct and report censuses of their charges which for one reason or another were never timely and often rare.

Such was the case for the Southern Apache Agency Census of 1877 included in our petition materials. Evidently, earlier in 1861 President Lincoln dispatched William Frederick Milton Army to take censuses of the Indians of the New Mexico Territory where he, as the Special Indian Agent of the Southern Apache Agency, took a formal U.S. Census in 1870 in different New Mexico counties. He titled the census, Southern Apache Indian Country. These and other documents of the United States in the 19th century prepared the Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico to identify descendant families of the Mimbres Bands of Gila Apache, otherwise known as Coppermine Apache, our ancestral Nation, in New Mexico.

This has been part of an effort to reunite our Nation and exert our sovereign right to proclaim our Indian identity as individuals and as a Nation. Our goal has been to revitalize our culture, traditions and language. Our oral histories tell us that our ancestors continued to gather secretly with their extended families in the mountains of the Black Range for private gatherings and ceremonies. We have been gathering since Fort Thorn was dissolved. Some families were so impoverished that they began to scatter throughout southwestern New Mexico and beyond, searching for a means to support themselves peacefully. Roughly half of our kin live in California today as urban Indians in enclaves of Los Angeles in the High Desert of San Bernardino, Riverside and San Diego counties. These families were invited to attend a special gathering in the summer of 2008.

In July 2008, various Apache Nations met at the Cochise Stronghold in Arizona for a private ceremony. This was a large gathering of people, made up of representatives from Federally Recognized and Unrecognized Apache Nations. Our Nation was revived in this very sacred space. It was grassroots gathering free of tribal politics. Manuel Paul Sanchez, our current chair, was an articulate young man who spoke about the need for unity among all Apache peoples and the restoration of identity for the Unrecognized at the council fire. The families of the Unrecognized were encouraged by the late Eddy Montoya who spoke the

words, "Let's organize." Thus, by January 2009, word of mouth spread throughout Southern New Mexico, Arizona and elsewhere on our efforts to gather our people back together as one Nation. At this time, we are fully supported by all of the federally recognized Apache nations.

Families began coming forward to enroll in person and through emails, letters, and inquiries on the telephone. They told family stories of their connection to our ancestors, often submitting private family land documents and genealogies. Due to the overwhelming response, it became obvious that we needed to implement a formal process of enrollment. We had an attorney that advised us on what forms to use. A generous benefactor provided computers and a machine with supplies to produce enrollment cards. We upgraded from keeping the files in a cardboard box with about 25 folders to donated used file cabinets filled with documents.

When we saw that many of our potential member families retained land patents in New Mexico from the 19th and early 20th century, we realized that we could reconnect with lost families by doing research on the land documents. Our families that were living in New Mexico began to bring forward their extended family members living in other states.

As the membership grew, we began to formalize our alliances, organize meetings and host gatherings. By May 2011 the Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico was a non-profit, and by 2012, the Elder's Council, named after our most sacred site, the Ojo Caliente Restoration Society was formed in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Membership guidelines were included in our governing document. Our numbers continued to grow rapidly.

The OCRS began outreach by visiting our sacred sites and former homelands. This prompted Federally Acknowledged Nations in Arizona, New Mexico and across the border, La Nacion, a coalition of all Apache Nations currently existing in Mexico to initiate formal government to government relations. These alliances precipitated a flood of applications for enrollment as the word of our reunification continued to spread.

Effective June 24, 2018, current Chairman Manuel Paul Sanchez of the Chihene Nde Nation of New Mexico appointed Paul A. Martinez to head the Enrollment and Membership Committee. Other members were appointed by the Chairman to manage the many requests for membership. These members were as follows: Helen Jurado, Velma Provencio, Jessica Inez Martinez, Nancy Lopez, Frankie Renteria, and Gilbert Flores. As of April 5, 2023, applications for enrollment have slowed to an average of three to four per month. At this time, only two members are still dedicated to reviewing prospective enrollees' applications, backup documents, family lineages, DNA results, including investigating the veracity of the potential member's claim and filing. Helen and Larry Jurado do call for assistance when there is a need for all hands-on deck. However, the tribe is considering making some adjustments to the committee and procedural changes. Having digitized the files for the Office of Federal Acknowledgement, our chosen local vendor has made a cost-effective and secure offer to store our existing physical membership files for us at their site.

We have collected and filed our membership roll in the traditional Apache way, by family groupings and not by individuals in one continuous list. The groupings are stapled together under the heading of ancestral surnames which are included at the top of the first page

for each family grouping. Each ancestral family group is filed in its own folder. Family folders are filed alphabetically in our file cabinets. It must be remembered that Indians in New Mexico often acquired surnames during the colonial Spanish period, therefore some families may have more than one ancestral surname.

Various members of the Membership Committee are assigned to determine the veracity of the claim for enrollment. These individuals are responsible for assuring that appropriate vital documents, such as, birth certificates or baptism certificates, and/ or marriage documents are in order. These and land possession documents are verified either through Ancestry.com, Family Search.org and the Bureau of Land Management Database, as appropriate. Descent is verified through family surnames, oral histories, genealogies or personal interviews. Contacts with Southern New Mexico historians, and academics specializing in Southern Apache history may be made to determine appearance of leadership families on rations rolls and other historic documents.