TIPS ABOUT USING THE GUIDE TO AMERICAN INDIAN DOCUMENTS IN THE CONGRESSIONAL SERIAL SET: 1817 – 1899

The Serial Set is a compilation of U.S. Congressional publications that have been published by either the U.S. Senate or U.S. House of Representatives. It consists of reports and documents of Senate and House committees about the bills and resolutions involved in lawmaking, reports and documents from federal agencies, and a few documents from state legislatures. There are 10,000+ documents in this bibliography; this website contains 7,200+ of these titles. When users access this online collection in our website American Indian and Alaska Native Documents in the Congressional Serial Set: 1817 -1899 at https://digitalcommons.law.ou.edu/indianserialset/ they need to know that the subject headings are those of Steven L. Johnson’s GUIDE TO AMERICAN INDIAN DOCUMENTS IN THE CONGRESSIONAL SERIAL SET: 1817 – 1899 (1977) and were taken directly from the historical documents that this guide indexes. These subject headings reflect how Congress viewed relations between the Indian Nations and the U.S. government. Users need to know how these subject headings might differ from how we would assign subject headings to these documents today. The following notes derive from what we’ve learned while working with this website project. Also included some general usage notes –

- Large tribes may have many subject headings, such as the Sioux who have 51; small tribes may have only one general subject heading that includes everything about them, such as the Adnochtion Indians, Biloxi Indians, Maricopa Indians, and Suwanu Indians.
- Because the borders of Indian Nations reach across national borders you will find entries for Canada and Mexico.
- Because the U.S. along with their Indian allies were engaged in several wars with Great Britain and France you will find subject headings for these nations.
- Some tribes and tribal groupings are grouped together, such as “Southeastern Indians,” “Southwestern Indians,” “Northwest Indians”/“Northwestern Indians,” “New York Indians,” “Western Indians” and “Texas Indians”. You will also see that minor variations, such as “Northwest Indians” and “Northwestern Indians,” which although differing from each other by only three letters, are indexed separately.
- You will encounter different spellings from current spellings for the names of tribes. Examples: one current spelling is “Pottawatomie” but Johnson uses “Potawatomi”; the current Kaw Nation is “Kansa” in Johnson. If you don’t know the variant spellings or names for an Indian Nation I recommend that you research that name at that Indian Nation’s website.
- The subject heading of “Mission Indians” refers only to Indians in California who were attached to missions.
- The subject heading of “Christian Indians” refers to tribes that Congress considered wholly or predominately Christian.
- You’ll see these two major subdivisions of subject headings for tribes: “Claims” and “Claims by”. These are very different: “Claims” were usually claims filed by individuals or groups of individuals for compensation because they had fought against Indian tribes of behalf of the United States or individual states; such requests are also found in the subject heading of “Pensions”. “Claims by” were claims filed by tribes against the U.S. or state governments for damages done to tribes. Both subject headings contain many names, and can be used for researching tribal histories or individual genealogies. There are also two variations of these subject headings: “Claims and Pensions” and “Pensions”.
• Looking for names? You will find major historical figures such as Crazy Horse, Geronimo, Sitting Bull, General George Armstrong Custer, Andrew Jackson, Henry Schoolcraft, George Catlin, Seth Eastman, and John Fremont; other people such as William Henry Holmes, Walter P. Jenny, and Nelson Appleton Miles. There are many more names of people in in “Claims” as noted above; it is best to use keyword searching to find them for either genealogical research or tribal history.

• “Battles” list major engagements. “Massacres” list victories by Indian tribes, but also massacres by U.S. troops, such as the massacre of Cheyenne and Arapaho elders, women, and children by U.S. troops, and the massacre by U.S. troops of Indians at Wounded Knee.

• Engagements by Indian Nations against white settlers use the phrase “Depredations and Hostilities,” such as “Sioux Indians – Depredations and Hostilities” or “Kansas – Depredations and Hostilities”. For Indian Territory you will see both “Indian Territory – Depredations and Hostilities” and the additional category of “Crimes and Disorders”. You will also see “Mexico – Depredations and Hostilities” and “Canada – Depredations and Hostilities”. Engagements by the U.S. military against tribes can be listed as “Claims – Depredations by U.S. Troops”.

• You will see subject headings for both the national-level “Commissioner of Indian Affairs” and the local “Superintendents of Indian Affairs” for states or groups of states such as Florida, Montana, New Mexico, and “Central,” ‘Northern,” and “Southern”.

• Expeditions are indexed and listed as “Expeditions”.

• Forts are indexed and listed as “Military Posts”.

• Indian Agencies are indexed and listed as “Indian Agencies”.

• Railroads are indexed and listed as “Railroads”.

• Reservations are indexed and listed as “Reservations”.

• Pueblos are indexed by name, such as Nambe Pueblo and Santa Ana Pueblo. There is also a subject heading for “Pueblo Indians” and additional materials in “New Mexico”.

• Commissions, including the Dawes Commission, the Sitting Bull Commission, and three additional commissions, are indexed as “Commissions”.

• Some subjects important in the development of Indian law are “Blood Indians,” “Citizenship, U.S.”, “Education and Civilization,” “Indian, Defined,” and “Indian Country, Defined”.

• There are more documents, and more precise documentation, about American Indians in the lower 48 states than there are about Alaskan Natives and Aleutian Islanders.

• You will not find subject headings for the Taino tribe in Puerto Rico; there are also no entries for “Puerto Rico”.

• For all of the above reasons you should always supplement a search that uses subject headings with a keyword search.

• Federal agencies some of whose publications are in the Serial Set include: the U.S. Bureau of American Ethnology, the U.S. Department of the Interior, and the Secretary of the Interior, with the Office of Indian Affairs being indexed as “Indian Department”; the Smithsonian Institution and National Museum; the Treasury Department and Secretary of the Treasury; the U.S. Board of Indian Commissioners and U.S. Indian Commission; the U.S. Geological Survey; and the U.S. Department of War and Secretary of War.

• The “Annual Messages” of the President of the United States are indexed in “President of the United States” under “Annual Messages” and “State of the Union”. This document includes reports for all the Executive Branch agencies that were involved in American Indian and Alaskan Native affairs from 1817 through 1898.
These are subject headings for larger Indian Nations that you can use to research the history of an Indian Nation’s relations with the United States and some state governments, or to find documents to include in a tribal history. The following subject headings may not exist for every tribe, and some tribes will have additional headings –

Agreements [can also include names of specific agreements]
Allotments
Annuities
Citizenship
Claims [claims against a tribe]
Claims of [claims of a tribe]
Commissions
Condition
Councils
Depredations and Hostilities
Education
Encounters with Expeditions
Freedmen
General Indian Council
Hunting Rights
Indian Agencies
Indian Agents
Lands
Mining Rights
Prisoners of U.S.
Railroads
Removal
Reservations
Roads
Service in Revolutionary War/Service in Civil War/Service in Seminole War
Timber
Treaties [can also include names of specific treaties such as the “Treaty of 1830 (Dancing Rabbit Creek)” and “Treaty of 1835 (New Echota)”]
Trust Funds

Abbreviations that this guide and website use –

BIA – Bureau of Indian Affairs
C – Congress
CIA – Commissioner of Indian Affairs
co. – company
Col. – Colonel
comm. – committee
com’r – commissioner