



Next year marks the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Accordingly, interest in participation in the Revolutionary War by our ancestors is on the increase. This session provides a basic introduction to researching Revolutionary War soldiers and patriots.

Differences from Researching Participants in Later Wars

- While federal records are important for pensions and some other records, researching people in the Revolutionary War often requires searching in multiple, often non-standard records.
- No source is complete. Searching should use EVERY source.
- Libraries and digitized books become more important for finding information.
- It is essential to use records of the original 13 colonies, because states rather than the federal government maintain many of the records.
- Record loss may be substantial, requiring working around key record types.

Three Major Categories of Service

- Descendants of all three are eligible for membership in DAR – Daughters of the American Revolution or SAR – Sons of the American Revolution)
- Continental Line
 - Continental Army (Continental Line) – states raised units for the Continental Line, which then fell under the command of the national army.
 - Continental Line often signed for longer service than militia (years or the duration)
 - Aged 16 to 60
- State or Local Militia
 - Ordinary citizens serving mainly in defensive or emergency situations.
 - Served as Minutemen, Infantry, or Cavalry
 - Could be overlapping organizations in a given area.
 - Service lasted from a few days to months.
 - Most enlistees were aged 16 to 30.
- Non-military Service

- Various activities, including public service (local government jobs, serving on Committees of Safety or Correspondence)
- Providing troop support such as lodging, food, arms, uniforms, or transportation
- Swearing an oath of loyalty to the cause or the patriot government

Basic “How To” Resources for Finding Revolutionary War Ancestors

- FamilySearch wiki -- ([https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Revolutionary War, 1775 to 1783](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Revolutionary_War,_1775_to_1783))
- Ancestry -- (<https://support.ancestry.com/s/article/American-Revolutionary-War-Records>)
- National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) – (<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/american-revolution>)
- Fold3 -- (<https://www.fold3.com/collection/us-revolutionary-war-us/description>).

Begin with Clues to an Ancestor’s Service

- Family stories
- SAR markers on grave
- Biographies in local histories (aka “mug books”)
- 1840 census

Then Locate Basic Information About Possible Service

- State(s) of residence.
- Rank
- Unit
- Research history of the military unit (use commander’s name)
- Use the various “routes” to further records:
 - DAR Genealogical Research System
 - NARA and other Free or Subscription sites (FamilySearch, Ancestry, Fold3)
 - Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office site

Other Entryways into Revolutionary War Records

- Online Revolutionary War Indexes and Records – A Genealogy Guide
<https://www.militaryindexes.com/revolutionarywar/>
- DAR Genealogy System
 - <https://www.dar.org/research/genealogy-resources/using-genealogical-research-system-grs>
 - Click on “Overview and Help Section”
 - Click on “New Search” or “Advanced Search”
 - Fill in at least one of the starred boxes.
 - You can click on descendants’ lists for submitters and purchase copies of applications.
 - If you are working toward documentation for membership in DAR or SAR, the local chapter’s Registrar can access additional records to assist.

Service Records

- NARA has compiled service records, although these are sketchy compared to those of later wars.
- Large numbers of soldiers have no service records in federal data.

- Start by searching "Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783," databases of compiled military service records, various microfilmed record books, and miscellaneous numbered records.
- Several of these are available online via NARA, Ancestry, FamilySearch, and Fold3, accessible using links at: <https://www.archives.gov/research/military/american-revolution>.
- Fold3 is especially rich in these records.
- State-level records contain many more service records, especially records of payment.

Pensions

- Congress enacted the first pension act August 26, 1776, half pay for officers and enlisted men.
- Series of Congressional acts gradually expanded the length of time and eligibility for pension, culminating in the Act of 1832, which provided pensions for life to surviving veterans.
- The Act of 1818 based pensions on financial need – numerous applications survive.
- 1832 Act provided for amounts depending on the length of service with no restrictions on eligibility based on disability or financial need.
- Documents from most pension applications before 1814 perished when Washington, D. C. burned during the War of 1812.
- Often, details of service, family members (especially for 1818 act), statements of associates or neighbors, but level of detail averages less than for Union Civil War pensions
- Sites Providing Access to pension files (do not assume any of these are complete!)
 - NARA - <https://catalog.archives.gov/search-within/300022>
 - Southerners who received pensions have transcribed copies (along with other resources) - <https://revwarapps.org/>
 - Pension files are presented alphabetically by the soldiers' last name (S – soldier, W – widow, R – rejected)
 - Searchable! Be sure to use both "Zoom" and "Freefind"
 - Examples, Benjamin Taylor, Thomas English
 - Files are digitized and available on Fold3.
 - Choose to use either "Search" or "Browse" for U. S. Revolutionary War
 - Browse allows step-by-step search for an individual.
 - Ancestry – search for key words "Revolutionary War Pension" in "Card Catalog"
 - Access to digitized originals
 - Family Search – has index that leads to Fold3 scans
([https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Revolutionary War Pension Records and Bounty Land Warrants](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Revolutionary_War_Pension_Records_and_Bounty_Land_Warrants))
- Pension payment ledgers (often have death dates)
- Final payment vouchers – index cards are available; complete files can have much detail!
 - <https://www.fold3.com/publication/654/us-final-payment-vouchers-index-for-military-pensions-1818-1864>
 - Scanning is in progress, with some states completed (DE, GA)

Bounty Land

- Veterans who survived long enough and sometimes their widows under the Act of 1850
- Expanded eligibility in Act of 1855
- Applications are bundled with pension files.

- Most warrants for land were sold and redeemed at land offices far from the state of the veteran's residence.
 - Thus, one can find information on the warrant and service unit from land patents.
 - Search on the General Land Office web site by unchecking the patentee box and searching in "Any State" - <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx>
 - Look for the veteran's name in the list of land parcels and examine the image or details.

State Records

- 13 original states still possess records of their Revolutionary soldiers and sailors.
- Several have issued printed compilations – these may be searchable in Ancestry, FamilySearch, or Fold3
- Include muster rolls, descriptive rolls, payroll records, and enlistment records.
- For details on individual states, check state archives or that state's FamilySearch wiki.
- An excellent resource for state links is at: <https://www.learnwebskills.com/patriot/revservice.htm> .
- Individual states might have offered land in payment for service.
 - For example, North Carolina military reserve for bounty land is in present-day Tennessee.
 - This was available only to soldiers enlisting in the Continental Line

Non-Military Service

- Look in local records – Deed Books for bonds posted, Focus on Court Records (Minutes, Order Books)
- FamilySearch, state archives, local records, and published record transcripts and abstracts

Books and Journals

- There are numerous published record transcriptions or abstracts– but many are out-of-print.
- Check Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/>) or Hathitrust (<https://www.hathitrust.org/>) for some
- Try googling the book title and "internet archive" or "hathitrust."
- A good genealogical or historical library is an excellent resource for these.
- If you can, visit the DAR (Washington, D. C.) or SAR (Louisville, KY) libraries.
- Journal of the American Revolution - <https://allthingsliberty.com/> (all-time favorite rabbit hole)
 - Dozens of articles are in their archive and accessible.
 - The annuals are available from them, or on Amazon.

Manuscripts and Unpublished Documents

- Finally, letters, manuscripts, and other documents may survive in archival collections.
- This is a "long shot."
- Search using Archive Grid, as discussed in an earlier session in this series.

Example: John Eddleman/Addleman

1. Book on Revolutionary accounts – spelling was "Addleman."
2. Land grant in the North Carolina Military Reserve (western Tennessee)
3. Montgomery County, Tennessee deeds proved it was my ancestor.
4. Details from NC Continentals, Southern Campaign site
5. Enlistment Paper on NC State Archives website

6. He is NOT in compiled service records or mentioned in any pension application or book on the Revolutionary War in NC

Example: Leonard Welker

1. First, I had to "overcome" identification of the wrong Welker as an ancestor.
2. Back traced from his 1816 will and probate.
3. A distant relative found a land grant in Northumberland Co., PA
4. 1800 Lincoln Co., NC Census
5. Found land and other records in Rowan Co., NC, 1789-1796+
6. Repeated searches in Northumberland County, PA for records
7. Fold3 search found his listing for two frontier ranger units, serving 1778-1783.
8. Summary of the history of the Wyoming Valley massacre and the "Great Runaway"

Non-military Examples: Peter Gearhart, Jacob Rhyne, Valentine Mauney, Nicholas Friday

1. Franklin Co., VA court order book – Gearhart provided a horse to the patriots.
2. North Carolina Receipts – Jacob Rhyne provided "services"
3. Valentine Mauney and Nicholas Friday were elected to service on the Tryon County, NC Committee of Safety

A Final Caution: You Have to Document Connections to the Patriot's Descendants to gain membership in the lineage society. This is often the most difficult part!

Bibliography

[State-level books and other resources may be found at: <https://www.dar.org/national-society/about-dar/dar-publications>. You can find many state resources by using a search engine, searching for: "Revolutionary War" <state's name>; or contact the appropriate state archive.]

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