

Compiled by Karen West Wente

## **Where to Find your Revolutionary War Ancestors**

An article from **GenealogyBank.com**

(GenealogyBank is an online website with annual membership for \$6.58/month or a monthly membership for \$19.95/month. It's a no-brainer to go ahead with the annual membership and then you can cancel or renew your membership at any time.)

By Gena Philibert-Ortega, July 28, 2014

Do you have a Revolutionary War ancestor? Maybe you have always heard that your ancestor was a soldier or a patriot during the American Revolution. Perhaps you have a female ancestor who was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR). Do you have copies of your ancestor's military records but are not sure where to go next with your family history research? It's time to make a genealogy research plan.

When thinking about researching your Revolutionary ancestor, consider what records may be left behind that result from his military service, death, and even his legacy. Also keep in mind where such records may be held. While it's easy to assume that the majority of records will be found at the National Archives or a subscription-based website, there are various online repositories with historical Revolutionary-period records useful to your ancestry research.

Ask questions of each record you find and then look for documents that answer those questions. While some of the research you do will involve looking for documents that include his name, there will be general histories about events your ancestor was involved in—which don't specifically mention him by name—that you will also want to

consult to learn more about his day-to-day life in the battlefields and political developments of the time.

Not sure where to start? Begin first with an overall search of newspapers and digitized books.

## 1) Newspaper Articles and Historical Books

In my previous article [Tracing Your Colonial & Revolutionary Ancestry in Newspapers](#), I wrote about articles that can be found in GenealogyBank's [Historical Newspaper Archives](#) for finding your Revolutionary War ancestor. Whether you are just starting your research or have been at it for years, you should begin with newspapers to see what more you can learn. Because GenealogyBank is constantly adding newspapers, searching just once is not enough—keep coming back, to search the new material. A helpful feature of GenealogyBank's Newspaper Archives search page is that you can narrow your search to an “Added Since” date so that you are not going through the same results you viewed previously.

Obviously, one of the newspaper article-types that you will hope to find is an obituary. An obituary may provide key information including family members' names, military service, occupation, and the cemetery where he is buried.

One resource researchers might not be as familiar with is GenealogyBank's [Historical Documents & Records](#) collection, which includes the American State Papers. These federal government documents can include mentions of Revolutionary War soldiers—and their widows—as they applied for things like pensions.

**Search Tip:** As you search the GenealogyBank collections, make sure to keep in mind name variations. Don't just stop after searching

one version of your ancestor's name. Write out a list of various name combinations, and consider their initials, name abbreviations (Jno, Benj., Wm.), and nicknames—as well as possible misspellings of the first and last name.

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<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Delaware</a>	<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">North Carolina</a>
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Dist. of Columbia</a>	<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">North Dakota</a>
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<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Iowa</a>	<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">South Dakota</a>
<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Kansas</a>	<input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">Tennessee</a>



## 2) Online Grave Listings

In addition to newspaper articles and historical books, there are several online resources available for lists of Revolutionary War soldiers' graves. To read more about these resources, see the article Revolutionary War Cemetery Records on the FamilySearch Wiki.



# Revolutionary War Cemetery Records

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*This Revolutionary War-related article is a stub. You can help by expanding it.*

[United States](#) ↗ [U.S. Military](#) ↗ [Revolutionary War](#) ↗ **Cemetery Records**

Cemetery records can aid in locating information about a Revolutionary War ancestor. Societies such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Sons of the American Revolution have compiled lists and indexes of known Revolutionary War soldiers. State organizations and local histories often make note of Revolutionary War veterans buried in their locality

The [Daughters of the American Revolution](#) has published the grave locations of Revolutionary War soldiers in the following source:

- [DAR Annual Report to the Smithsonian Institution, 1900-1974](#)<sup>ⓘ</sup>. These lists have been continued in the DAR Magazine. (FHL book 973 B2dar) beginning with the October 1969 issue. The lists give name, birth date, death date, burial place, rank, and state and regiment of service if known. There are more than 58,500 identified graves.

The lists published in the DAR Magazine between 1974 and 1982 were reprinted as the following:

- [Located Graves of Soldiers and Patriots of the American Revolution](#)<sup>ⓘ</sup>. Washington, D.C.: National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1977-1982. (FHL book 973 V3I.) Includes the

### 3) Daughters of the American Revolution

Want to verify that your ancestor was a Revolutionary War patriot? Maybe you have a copy of a female family member's DAR application. Looking to become a member of the DAR or the SAR (Sons of the American Revolution)? Even if you aren't interested in joining these groups, they have a vast collection of resources that can help you with your research. According to DAR member and chapter registrar Sheri Beffort Fenley, there are two resources all non-DAR members should use.

The first is the [Genealogical Research System](#). According to their website, the Genealogical Research System (GRS) "is a collection of databases that provide access to the many materials amassed by the DAR since its founding in 1890. The second resource Fenley recommends is the [DAR Library](#).



## Genealogical Research System

National Society Daughters of the American Revolution



DAR Library  
Washington, DC



The DAR Genealogical Research System (GRS) is a free resource provided by the [National Society Daughters of the American Revolution](#) (DAR) to aid general genealogical research and to assist with the DAR membership process. The GRS is a collection of databases that provide access to the many materials amassed by the DAR since its founding in 1890.

DAR members across the country are passionate ambassadors for genealogical preservation and research, and the National Society is committed to being a premier provider of genealogical resources. The online databases are the culmination of 10 years of work by members volunteering to scan and index the



Text Size:

## DAR Library

Since its founding in 1896, the DAR Library has grown into a specialized collection of American genealogical and historical manuscripts and publications, as well as powerful on-site databases. The DAR Library collection contains over 185,000 books, 300,000 research files, thousands of manuscript items, and special collections of African American, Native American, and women's history, genealogy and culture. Nearly 30,000 family histories and genealogies comprise a major portion of the book collection, many of

### Featured Publication



America's Women in the Revolutionary Era 1760-1790: A



While you are looking at the DAR homepage, make sure to click on the Resources tab. Here you'll find the Revolutionary Pension Card Index as well as a great eBook entitled ***Forgotten Patriots: African American and American Indian Patriots of the Revolutionary War: A Guide to Service, Sources, and Studies.***

#### 4) Google Books

I would also recommend using [Google Books](#) to look through books and periodicals involving the DAR and their various chapters, as well as other genealogical information from the Revolutionary War. It's a great place to find lineages and transcriptions.



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## 5) Sons of the American Revolution

The Sons of the American Revolution [Genealogical Research Library](#) in Kentucky also may be of use to your research. To learn more about their collection and their SAR Patriot Index, see their website.



## SAR GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH LIBRARY

### Library Navigation

- Guidelines
- Friends of the Library
- What's Available
- Where to Start
- Research Assistance
- SAR Genealogy Assistants
- Catalog
- From the desk of the Library Director
- Wish List

### Craik Special Collections News

- [Artifact is Unearthed at Site of New Museum Construction](#)  
Post date: 13 Feb 2013 - 4:36pm
- [The Mary & James S. Craik Special Collections Room at the SAR Genealogical Research Library](#)  
Post date: 19 Jan 2011 - 1:24pm

### NSSAR Genealogical Library News

- [Lucius P. Deming: Our First President General](#)  
Post date: 17 Jul 2014 - 2:49pm
- [DC Society SAR through the Years](#)  
Post date: 30 Apr 2014 - 9:02am
- [Who Was the 2ND Signer?](#)  
Post date: 13 Jan 2014 - 2:51pm

[more](#)

[Home](#) » [NSSAR Library](#)

### What's Available in the SAR Genealogical Library?

[Calendar of Events](#)

## 6) National Archives & Records Administration (NARA)

The National Archives holds the records of our federal government, including military records. For the Revolutionary War you can find everything from Compiled Military Service Records to pensions and bounty land records. (Please note that NARA is the caretaker for federal records; they do not have state records such as state militia records. For those records, you need to contact the appropriate state archives.) Click here to see a list of NARA [Revolutionary War records](#). A good tutorial for learning more about obtaining military records from NARA is on their web page: [Genealogy Research in Military Records](#).



# *National Archives and Records Administration*

700 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20408-0001

## *Revolutionary War Service, 1775–1783*

The National Archives holds records relating to military service during the Revolutionary War, including both Continental troops and state troops that served as Continental troops. The National Archives does not have custody of records for service in State militias. To find those records, check with the State archives of the state in which the soldier served.

### **Compiled Military Service Records (CMSRs)**

In the 1890s, the Department of War used numerous sources, such as muster rolls, descriptive rolls, and pay rolls, to create compiled military service records. CMSRs generally show when a soldier joined a unit and if he was present when the unit was mustered. **Note:** The Department of War abstracted the compiled military service records for men who fought in the Revolutionary War from extant records among its files in an attempt to create substitutes for records destroyed by fires in 1800 and 1814. Because the Department was not able to reconstruct every record, a soldier may have fought in a Continental Army unit during the war, but there may not be a compiled military

## **7) FamilySearch Resources**

There are also several Revolutionary War databases available from the free website FamilySearch, including the searchable [United States Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Applications, 1800-1900](#). Most people automatically think of service records and pensions when they think of military service—but what is often missed are bounty land grants. Military Bounty Land was offered to men in return for their military service. This served as both an enticement and a reward for longer service. Your ancestor may have received much more from his service than just monetary compensation. To learn more about bounty land and how to research it, see Christine Rose’s book ***Military Bounty Land 1776-1855***.

The [United States Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783](#) from FamilySearch “contains images of muster rolls, payrolls, strength returns, and other personnel, pay, and supply records of the

American Army during the Revolutionary War.” This collection is not searchable; you have to browse it, and you need to know the state your soldier fought for. Make sure to utilize the FamilySearch Family History Research Wiki to learn more about other Revolutionary War documents available from FamilySearch.



The screenshot shows the FamilySearch website interface. At the top left is the FamilySearch logo. To its right are navigation links: Family Tree, Memories, Search (highlighted in a green box), and Indexing. Below these is a horizontal menu with buttons for Page, Edit, Talk, and History. The main heading is "Family History Research Wiki" in a purple serif font. Below the heading is a sub-heading: "Get genealogical research advice, or learn where to find record collections in our [79,572](#) articles". The central feature is a search box with the text "Search by place or topic (or click on the map)". Below the search box is a "Search Tips" section with two bullet points: "Start with broad localities, then click through to smaller ones" (with the example "England") and "Use keywords, not phrases" (with the example "Hispanic Resources"). To the right of the search box is a world map with labels for North America, Central America, South America, Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia, and Pacific. An "All Countries" button is located at the bottom of the map. Below the search box and tips are three small thumbnail images showing historical documents or photos.

Wherever you are in your search for your Revolutionary War ancestor, make sure to have a plan and a list of genealogy resources —and then go through each one. Using a combination of sources including newspapers, digitized books, and military records, you can start to put together the story of your Revolutionary War ancestor soldier’s life.

Because the majority of soldiers in the Revolutionary War were men, I referred to them as “he.” However, women did fight alongside their male relatives on the battlegrounds. To learn more about the women of the Revolutionary War, see the book ***Revolutionary Mothers:***

***Women in the Struggle for America's Independence*** by Carol Berkin.

End of article

**Besides the websites in the above article, great places to find Revolutionary Records are:**

**Fold 3** <https://www.fold3.com>

Fold 3 is also found on Ancestry's 'All Access Membership' subscription.

**Ancestry** has Revolutionary Records such as: Newspapers; SAR Applications; War rejected pensions; Revolutionary Soldiers from different states; Sailors; Women in the Revolution; Disabled War Veterans; Pensions; Land Warrants; Burials; etc.

**MyHeritage** offers Revolutionary Records such as: Pension Records; list of Soldiers & Sailors; Revolutionary Soldiers from different states; Muster Rolls; etc.

Another wonderful resource is:

**The David Library of the American Revolution**

1201 River Rd., Washington Crossing, PA 18977

(215) 493-6776, <http://www.dlar.org>

**Another incredible resource is a 1771 detailed inventory of 38,000 property owners in what was then the Province of Massachusetts Bay, which includes present-day Massachusetts and Maine. Present-day Maine at that time was the District of Maine within the Province of Massachusetts Bay.**

**<http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~hsb41/masstax/masstax.cgi>**

**I guess most property owners then were farmers. I got details on six ancestors, all farmers. The information included how many buildings were on their property, how many acres of various types were on their property, amounts of food products grown and produced (such as cider), and exact numbers of different farm animals they owned.**

**Search by last name only, to avoid your person not showing up because a first name was misspelled. There weren't too many high school or college graduates writing the assessments. If you don't find your ancestor who you think should have been listed, try a spelling variation of the last name.**

**Check out [Cyndi's list](#). She has identified over 100 places to find Revolutionary War Records. You need to look under the category 'Military – Revolutionary War'. [https://www.cyndislist.com/us/american-revolution/#google\\_vignette](https://www.cyndislist.com/us/american-revolution/#google_vignette)**

## How to order your Revolutionary War Ancestor's military Records from the National Archives:

<https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/pre-ww-1-records>

## Was your ancestor a POW during the Revolutionary War?

Check out: <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/military/american-revolution/prisoners-1776-1783.pdf>

## Publications

Grundset, Eric. *Connecticut in the American Revolution: A Source Guide for Genealogists and Historians* (Washington, D.C., National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, 2016). Additional states in this series by Eric Grundset are also available.

Office of the Secretary of State. *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War: A Compilation from the Archives* (Salem, Mass., Higginson Book Company, 2000). Also available on FamilySearch at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/213956>.

White, Virgil D. ***Index to Revolutionary War Service Records*** (Waynesboro, Tenn, The National Historical Publishing Company, 1995).

Ward, Geoffrey C. **The American Revolution, An Intimate History** (based on the documentary film by Ken Burns, Sarha Botstein, and David Schmidt with a preface by Ken Burns. 2025. Alfred A. Knope. New York. 2025).

## **Family Search article**

**A Call to Arms: Researching Revolutionary War Ancestors** *Part 1: Muster Rolls and Related Proof of Service*

Melanie McComb, Genealogist,  
[melanie.mccomb@nehgs.org](mailto:melanie.mccomb@nehgs.org)

From **American Ancestors.org**

### **Published Records of Revolutionary War Service**

- Use Virgil White's *Index to Revolutionary War Service Records* to identify if someone has a service record and what state and regiment they served with.

- Consult state published resources to learn more details about your patriot (ex. *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War*).

## **Muster Rolls**

- A list or return of all troops, including officers and soldiers, present or accounted for on muster day.
- Soldiers would respond at roll call when their names were read aloud.
- Muster rolls often contain when a soldier joined or left a military unit (including if a soldier deserted).

## **Accessing Muster Rolls on Fold3.com**

- Collection: <https://www.fold3.com/title/469/revolutionary-war-rolls>
- Use the Browse option to drill down to a specific regiment. Start with state>regiment>then browse individual folders.
- You can also use the search box to find someone that may have tagged on a muster roll.

## **Accessing Muster Rolls on FamilySearch**

- Collection: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2068326>
- Search on a specific name you're trying to locate.

- Use the Browse option if name doesn't come up in search as not all records may be indexed.
- Consult state muster roll collections o Ex. Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2548057>

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- Consult state muster roll collections o Ex. Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783 - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2548057>

## **Service Records**

- Contents include their name, unit information, period of service, muster rolls, pay rolls, details about promotion in rank, imprisonment details (if POW), and more.
- Compiled Service Records index available on FamilySearch - <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1849623>

- Service Records can be found on Fold3 - <https://www.fold3.com/title/470/revolutionarywar-service-records>

## **Finding Records of Women's Service in Battles**

- Review governor minutes for mentions of annuities being paid to women for their service (ex. Mary Ludwig Hayes).
- Some of the governor minutes may appear on sites like Fold3.com, which has the Pennsylvania Archives collection (<https://www.fold3.com/title/450/pennsylvaniaarchives>)