

Bounty Land, Land Entry Files, and Homesteading

Melanie McComb, melanie.mccomb@nehgs.org

Bounty Land

At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress offered land grants to officers and soldiers who would fight in the Continental Army. There were at least two problems with the promise, made in 1776. First, the Continental Congress had zero authority at that time to issue land, and more importantly, they did not have any land to give.

After the Revolutionary War, the new Congress of the United States had to make good on their promise. They had to find the land and devise a process to award land to eligible soldiers. The original 13 colonies had been generous in their interpretation of what was theirs and their land claims frequently overlapped each other's territory.

The key to making bounty land a reality was the opening of the Northwest Territory which includes modern day Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and a portion of Minnesota.

During the time period that bounty land was awarded, there were numerous legislative acts spelling out the criteria for an award and other parameters circumscribing the process.

Eligibility and Process

The eligibility for bounty land varied in small ways between states. The basic criteria were that if a soldier served in the Continental Line for a minimum of three years, or until the end of the War if they enlisted towards the end of the conflict, they were eligible for bounty land.

Initially the federal government did not allow a soldier to assign their award to someone else, but as time dragged on, it became clear that soldiers were becoming too old to start afresh on new land and the law was changed in 1788 to allow assignment. The law also allowed a soldier to claim bounty land from both the federal government and a state government. The amount of land to be granted was dependent on the soldier's rank at the end of the War. States also varied in whether they permitted assignment.

For federal bounty land, initially the Secretary of War reviewed applications and issued warrants and the Treasury Department supervised the selection of land and issued the final patent. First a soldier had to apply for a land grant. If they met the criteria, they were issued a warrant which they took to the War Department and requested a survey of the land. After the survey was returned, a patent was issued and in theory, the soldier took possession of the land.

The process for state bounty land was similar: application, warrant, survey, patent. There were of course differences in the governmental agencies involved.

Finding the paper trail is sometimes challenging. The War Department suffered two fires in 1800 and in 1814 that destroyed many of the Revolutionary War warrants in its possession. So pre-1800 federal applications are gone. They have been replaced by cards that are filed with Revolutionary War Pension files and filmed on M804. The warrants for the Ohio Bounty Land are shown on NARA microfilm publication M829.

Federal Land

The land given by the federal government was in present-day state of Ohio and was in the counties of Noble, Guernsey, Tuscarawas, Muskingum, Coshocton, Holmes, Licking, Knox, Franklin, Delaware, Morrow, and Marion. Of the over 1 million acres claimed by warrant, only about half were finally patented.

State Specific Land

Generally, the first place to look is in Bockstruck's book *Revolutionary War Bounty Land Grants: Awarded by State Governments*. Some states have online archives which may also be used to start your search. Once you have confirmed that your ancestor was eligible for bounty land, you may start looking for the land and whether or not your ancestor took possession. Full names of sites along with URLs are in the Resources Section below.

Massachusetts did not authorize bounty land for its soldiers until 1801. The location of the land was in present day Aroostook County, in the township of Mars Hill on the Canadian border. Once you've located your soldier you can find his land by first using Family Search database "Massachusetts, land deeds, 1791-1884," and looking in the film "Land deeds, revolutionary war soldiers, Massachusetts, Mars Hill, book 1, 1829-1884" to see if the land was patented and then using the Digital Maine Repository to find the precise location in Mars Hill. See links below.

Maine first authorized bounty land in 1835 for soldiers currently living in Maine who served from either Maine or Massachusetts. Once you have located the name, check the Family Search database "Maine Revolutionary War Bounty Land Applications, 1835-1838" to see if a warrant was issued. Explore the Digital Maine Repository for additional information about the warrant.

New York authorized bounty land in 1783. They allowed double dipping (state and federal) and the minimum award was generous: 500 acres. Land in the present-day counties of Cayuga, Cortland, Onondaga, Seneca, Oswego, Schuyler, Tompkins, and Wayne was set aside for soldiers. The entire tract encompassed about 1.5 million acres. The 28 townships each had about 60,000 acres and were named for

classical literary heroes. The land was distributed by a process known as the balloting box. Review the balloting box documents for your ancestor.

Pennsylvania passed legislation in 1780 to authorize the provision of bounty land for soldiers. The land tract selected was in northwestern Pennsylvania and was referred to as “Donation Lands.” It covered parts of the counties of Erie, Crawford, Warren, Mercer, Venango, and Lawrence. Although the Bockstruck book includes Pennsylvania, you could start with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission to find your ancestor (see resources below). The PHMC site includes a surname index and a listing of the approximately location of each of the Donation Land Tracts. As other states did, the tracts were allocated by a lottery.

Maryland made provisions for bounty land beginning in 1777. The minimum grant to a soldier in Maryland was probably the smallest—only 50 acres. The land was located in present-day Garrett and Allegany Counties. To find your ancestor, start with the Bockstruck book, then go to the Maryland Archives website. They have a listing (numerical order) of which soldier was awarded which lot in the Military District.

Virginia supplied bounty land in two states: Ohio and present-day Kentucky. The awarding of bounty land was first approved in 1779 and the first warrant issued in 1782. Soldiers had to obtain a certificate before a warrant for a survey was issued. See Family Search or the Library of Virginia for the certificates and warrants. If the land was awarded in Kentucky, go to the Kentucky Land Office page. It is a user-friendly set of pages to find the original warrant, survey, and patent. If the land was awarded in Ohio, see Family Search – “Virginia Military District lands of Ohio; indexes.”

North Carolina issued its first warrant for bounty land in 1783. The Military District was in what is now the state of Tennessee. As was true of other states, the soldier first applied for land and when approved received a warrant which he could exchange for a survey. When the survey was approved, the Secretary of State for North Carolina issued a grant for the land. A second series of warrants was issued beginning in 1799, but the land was located and patented by Tennessee. Once you identify your soldier, search the Ancestry database “North Carolina and Tennessee, U.S., Revolutionary War Land Warrants, 1783-1843,” for the warrant and the Ancestry database “Tennessee, U.S. Early Land Registers 1778-1927,” for the location of the land.

South Carolina authorized bounty land in 1778. The location of land was in the northwestern corner of the colony, in a region known as District Ninety-Six and within the District as Cherokee Lands. This district was in the mountains and sparsely settled. The Cherokee Lands were taken during the American Revolution and renamed as counties in 1785. To find your South Carolina ancestor, use the South Carolina Department of Archives and History website (see link to search page below). Type in your

ancestors name (last name first, comma, first name) and his name should appear. The results page includes an image of the survey associated with him.

Georgia government first authorized bounty land in 1784. The Georgia strategy for giving land went well beyond enticing soldiers to fight on behalf of the colony. The Georgian government wanted to encourage settlement. In addition to granting land to soldiers of the Continental Line, Georgia rewarded militia and residents who served in the Carolinas. The final two categories of awardees were citizens who remained loyal to the cause for the entire War and British deserters. Georgia's bounty land for soldiers was located between the Apalachee and Oconee rivers in the area that is now Oconee, Oglethorpe, and Green Counties. To find your Georgia patriot you could use Bockstruck book or the Georgia State Archives Virtual Vault. To locate the warrant, use the Family Search database noted below Online Conference: Getting the Lay of the Land: Using American Land Deeds in Your Family History Research 4

Bounty Land for Other Conflicts

War of 1812: Land was located in present day states of Arkansas, Illinois, and Missouri (Michigan was planned, but not fulfilled).

NARA Publication

- War of 1812 Military Bounty Land Warrants, 1815-1858 (M848, 14 rolls)
- Ancestry Database: "U.S., War Bounty Land Warrants, 1789-1858" (includes M848 and M829 – Ohio Warrants)
- Fold3 Database: "War of 1812 Military Bounty Land Warrants, 1815"

Mexican War and Indian Wars also allowed bounty Land.

Land Entry Case Files

- These are records that document the transfer of public lands from the U.S. government to private ownership
- Public states do not include the following:
 - Original 13 colonies (Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia)
 - Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, and West Virginia
- Three types of land entry case files:
 - Military Bounty Land Warrants
 - Pre-1908 General Land Entry Files
 - Post-1908 General Land Entry Files

Locating Tract Books on FamilySearch:

- Contain the records of each parcel of land transferred from federal to private ownership in 28 of the 30 federal land states.
 - The tract books for Alaska and Missouri are lost.
 - Accessed on FamilySearch at <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2074276>
 - Browse by state, then volume #.
 - Not all records are indexed and searchable.
- Volumes are organized by state, in some states by land offices, and then by township number and range.
 - Within each volume, entries are arranged by Section, Township, Range.
- Use the Coverage Table on the FamilySearch wiki to identify which volume to find the corresponding tract book.
 - Coverage Table:
https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States,_Bureau_of_Land_Management_Tract_Books_Coverage_Table_-_FamilySearch_Historical_Records

Requesting Land Entry Case Files from the National Archives:

- For pre-1908 files, provide the following:
 - State
 - Land Office
 - Type of Patent Under Law (“Authority” field on BLM GLO web site)
 - Patent # (“Document Nr.” field on BLM GLO web site)
- For post-1908 files, provide the serial patent # (“Accession Nr” field on GLO web site)
- NATF Form 84 - <https://www.archives.gov/files/dc-metro/washington/natf-84.pdf>
- Order online - <https://eservices.archives.gov/orderonline>

Homesteading

- The Homesteading Act was signed in 1862.
- The law allowed any American (or immigrant pursuing the citizenship process) to purchase up to 160 acres of federal land.
- Buyer was required to live on the land for five years and perform necessary upkeep and additions.
 - Civil War Union veterans could use time served in military towards the residency requirement.
 - Settlers could also acquire the title of land if they lived on the land for 6 months and paid the government \$1.25 per acre.
- Eligibility:
 - Adults 21 years and older, which included the following:
 - Single women
 - Former enslaved people

- Immigrants (1st papers required – otherwise known as declaration of intention)
- The Process:
 - Go to the local land office.
 - Pay a small filing fee.
 - Live on the land and grow crops for 5 years.
 - After the 5 years, file for the patent (land title).
 - If approved, patent was awarded.
- What's in the Land Entry Case File?
 - Final Certificate
 - Final Receiver's Receipt
 - Testimony of Claimant
 - Testimony of Witness
 - Final Homestead Affidavit
 - Application and accompanying affidavits
- Which States Did NOT have Homesteads?
 - Original 13 colonies
 - Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Virginia
 - Hawaii, Kentucky, Maine, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, and West Virginia
- The law was not fully repealed until 1986, when it expired in Alaska. All previous states had repealed the law by 1976.
- Homestead Acts
 - Southern Homestead Act of 1866
 - Included and encouraged African Americans to obtain a homestead.
 - Timber Culture Act of 1873
 - Claimant required to plant trees.
 - No residency requirement.
 - Kinkaid Amendment (1904)
 - 640 acres to new homesteaders in western Nebraska.
 - Enlarged Homestead Act (1909)
 - Doubled acreage from 160 to 320 acres in marginal areas.
 - National Stock-Raising Homestead Act (1916)
 - Granted 640 acres for ranching purposes.

Did Your Ancestor Have a Homestead?

- Check census records for birthplace of head of family and children. You may notice a move shortly after 1862 out west.
- Check census records for the occupation of the head of household. Look for farmers that owned property.
- Review agriculture schedules to identify if the family had 160 acres (full portion) or 80 acres (half portion).
 - Early 20th century, you may see a higher increase (320-640 acres).

Online Resources:

- Bureau of Land Management General Land Office (GLO) Database - <https://gloreCORDS.blm.gov>
 - Click Search Documents.
 - Search by first and last name and include location if known.
- Ancestry.com is digitizing the files from the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

- U.S. Homestead Records, 1863-1908 -
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60593/>
- FamilySearch
 - Cancelled, Relinquished, or Rejected Land Entry Case Files, 1861-1932 -
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2170637>
 - Use the catalogue to locate individual homestead records from various land offices across the United States
- African American Homesteaders - <https://www.nps.gov/home/black-homesteading-in-america.htm>

Strategies for Using Homesteading Files:

- Immigrant Origins
 - Immigrants were required to have already filed their first papers (declaration of intention) in order to apply for a homestead.
 - Many land entry case files contain copies of the naturalization papers that were filed by the applicant.
 - Applications also list details about an ancestor's birthplace.
- Military Service
 - Veterans who served in the Union during the Civil War were eligible to apply for a homestead and use their military service towards the 5-year residency requirement.
 - Soldier's Discharge records are included as proof of service.
 - Information includes regiment information, where enlisted or drafted, occupation, birth date and birthplace.

References

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Federal Bounty Land

Clifford Neale Smith, Federal Land Series; A Calendar of Archival Materials on the Land Patents Issued by the United States, Volume 2: Federal Bounty Land Warrants of the American Revolution, 1799-1835 (Chicago, American Library Association, 1972)

National Archives, "Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files, ca. 1800 - ca. 1900," Record Group 15, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/567388> Online at Family Search, Ancestry and Fold3.

National Archives, "U.S. Revolutionary War Bounty Land Warrants Used in the U.S. Military District of Ohio and Relating Papers (Acts of 1788, 1803, and 1806), 1788-1806," Record Group 49, <https://www.archives.gov/files/publications/ref-info-papers/rip114.pdf> Online at Ancestry under the title "U.S., War Bounty Land Warrants, 1789-1858."

State-Specific Bounty Land

Massachusetts

Use the Family Search database "Land deeds, revolutionary war soldiers, Massachusetts, Mars Hill, book 1, 1829-1884" FHL 5656090. <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1881411>

See also *Digital Maine Repository* for location of land - <https://digitalmaine.com>

Maine

Maine Land Office, "Certificate Receipts" (2017). Maine Land Office. 1017.

https://digitalmaine.com/revolutionary_war_me_land_office/1017

New York

Pierce, Grace M. "The Military Tract of New York State," *The New York Genealogical and Biographical Record*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan. 1909):15-22. Digital versions at Internet Archive – free <http://archive.org/stream/newyorkgenealog040newy#page/21/mode/1up>

The balloting book, and other documents relating to military bounty lands, in the State of New York, Tompkins Public Library <https://www.tcpl.org/node/5244>

Pennsylvania

Archives site <https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Revolutionary-War.aspx>

Record Group 17 Records of the Land Office Donation Land Register

<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r17DonationLandSeries/r17-174DonationLandRegister/r17-174MainInterface.htm>

Maryland

List of awards to Revolutionary Soldiers – Lots Westward of Fort Cumberland

<https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/stagsere/se1/se1/000000/000001/html/020745-0001.html>

Not searchable – page by page only, however, it is alphabetical.

Map of military tracts <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3843g.ct000794/?r=0.603,0.114,0.479,0.261,0>

Virginia

Samuel Wilson, Catalogue of Revolutionary soldiers and sailors of the Commonwealth of Virginia to whom land bounty warrants were granted by Virginia for military services in the War for Independence (Baltimore: Southern Book Company, 1953) for Kentucky warrants.

Warrants, certificates and applications: *Library of Virginia* – search by name. Or see “Family Search Virginia Bounty Warrants 1779-1860” (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/414179>) for clearer copies of the same material.

Kentucky Secretary of State for searchable database

<https://www.sos.ky.gov/land/military/revwar/Pages/default.aspx>

Virginia Military District lands of Ohio ; indices, <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/758280>

North Carolina

Warrants: *Ancestry* database “North Carolina and Tennessee, U.S., Revolutionary War Land Warrants, 1783- 1843”

Location: *Ancestry* database “Tennessee, U.S. Early Land Registers 1778-1927,” for the location of the land.

South Carolina

South Carolina Department of Archives and History; Record and Image Search see

<http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov>

Georgia

Georgia Archives Virtual Vault - <https://vault.georgiaarchives.org>

“Georgia, Headright and Bounty Land Records, 1783-1909,” searchable database at *Family Search*

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1914217>

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National Archives Records and Administration, 2009). Available online at

<https://www.archives.gov/files/publications/ref-info-papers/rip114.pdf>.

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Raabe, Emily. *Pioneers: Life as a Homesteader* (New York: Powerkids Press, 2003).